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SHORT STORIES.

No. 655.] For the Week Ending July 20th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

The . . . Bronze . . Persephone.

"Great heaven! Do you think that I am guilty?"

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THE BRONZE PERSEPHONE.

By the Author of "Dr. Delamere's Patient," "What No Man Knew," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PAPA GUILBERT.

EVERYONE knew Papa Guilbert, who kept the queer little poky curio store in the Petite Rue Trois Etoiles, at the back of the Palais Royal—everyone, that is, who took an interest in curios, and, of course, his immediate neighbours.

A queer little place it was, that shop of Papa Guilbert's. You went down three steps from the street, and the tall, handsome Englishman who came in one day, had to bend his curly head to pass through the low door.

He had stepped in in passing, and asked the price of several curios—two he bought. The prices of two or three more were beyond him, he said, smiling. Then he noticed—he had keen eyes, for it was not prominently forward—a bronze statuette of Persephone, and before Papa Guilbert knew what he was doing, he had it in his hand. It was an exquisite work of art—a gem, and the customer's handsome dark eyes glowed as he looked at it.

"What is the price?" he asked.

"One thousand francs, Monsieur."

The Englishman laughed, and shook his head. Beautiful though the figure was, the price was preposterous—and this was intentional. In truth, Papa Guilbert was in no hurry to sell the Persephone.

His daughter Jesuita had taken an immense fancy to it, and the old man was torn between his love for her and his desire of gain—gain which was mainly for her, though, perhaps, some of that strange, miser love of bald acquisition found also a place in his heart. He had scanned the Englishman when the latter entered the shop, and noticed the outward signs of a wealthy customer.

Monsieur looked an aristocrat, was extremely well dressed, wore a diamond ring, but when he rejected one article because it was three hundred francs, another because it was two hundred and fifty francs, Papa Guilbert perceived that, despite his air of distinction, his faultless apparel, and his diamond ring, he was not a rich "milord," and therefore he named a prohibitory price for the Persephone.

The customer put down the statuette.

"You take me for a rich man Papa Guilbert," he said, laughingly; "but I am only a poor dramatist. Eh, bien! I will do without the Queen of Hades."

He gathered up the few comparative trifles he had bought, bade the old curio dealer "adieu!" and departed.

Half-an-hour later Jesuita came in from a rehearsal, and Papa Guilbert told her about the tall foreigner who wanted to buy Persephone.

The handsome Englishman came again two or three days later and had quite a chat with Papa Guilbert, and asked the prices of several articles of interest; but he only bought a curious little sixteenth century crucifix, which was comparatively cheap because it was a little damaged.

"Adieu, Papa Guilbert," he said as he was leaving; "or, I hope, *au revoir*. I am off to Italy this afternoon."

Nevertheless, Papa Guilbert thought he saw the stranger that evening. He passed the shop, crossed the road and disappeared down a court nearly opposite—a not very reputable place, so perhaps the old man was mistaken. But, then, what would you? Who knows where a man may go?

Still, it was nearly dark, and Papa Guilbert's sight was not what it once was. He only thought he saw the Englishman—he was not sure; but he had told Jesuita about *ce beau monsieur* coming again and chatting with him, and when she paused to bid him good-bye on her way to the theatre, he said:

"I think I saw Monsieur l'Anglais just now."

"Then he is not gone to Italy," said the dancer, laughing. "*Au revoir, chéri!*"—and away she went.

Then old Marthe, the charwoman, bade her master *au revoir*, and trotted off to her own dwelling, and Papa Guilbert was left alone.

The shop did not close until quite an hour later, and there were no shutters put up, the window being defended by a close iron cage-work.

Jesuita, when she came in from the theatre, let herself in with a key, and barred up the door behind her.

It was just on twelve when Jesuita returned home to-night. There was a smile on her pretty lips as she put her key in the lock—a funny incident had occurred at the theatre, with which she would make her father laugh, and the smile deepened, as she pictured the old man's enjoyment of the joke.

She opened the door. "*Me voici*," she began. Then, with a choking cry: "*Chéri—chéri!*" she flung herself down by the dark form lying prostrate on the floor, and lifted the grey head on her arm.

Even in the dim light she could see that the old man was dead. She felt his face—it was already cold; the lines were settling into rigidity. She felt his heart—there was not the faintest throb; and as she withdrew her hand, she saw that it was covered with blood.

Blood! Then her father had been murdered! Half frantic with grief and horror, yet preserving a singular presence of mind, the girl sprang to her feet, and turned up the light that she might see more clearly.

Yes, Papa Guilbert had been stabbed to the heart. His shirt and vest were saturated with blood, but the wound was not large. There was scarcely any blood on the floor.

Murder! Who could have done it? For robbery, of course!

But Jesuita cared nothing for that; she thought only of her father. He could not be dead—he could not!

She pressed her warm young lips passionately to the cold lips that could give no response, that would never

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

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speak again; then she rose once more, to go for the doctor.

On his arrival Dr. Simon saw in a moment that he could do nothing.

"My poor child!" he said, looking up to the agonised young face, "your father has been dead more than two hours. He has been murdered—stabbed to the heart. He could not have lived more than two seconds."

"I will find out who has done it, and kill him!" said the girl, fiercely, the fiery Spanish blood leaping in her veins, flashing in her splendid dark eyes.

"We must not move him," said the doctor, "until the police have been."

The motive of the robbery was clear. The till had been rifled, though of how much could not yet be known and some of the curios had been taken also, as would appear from others being knocked over, as if the thief had been hurried in his work.

CHAPTER II.

MISSING.

THE next day Jesuita was taken before the *commissaire*.

She was able to answer questions now, and to tell what she knew. Indeed, a strange, stony calm seemed to have taken possession of her—as if she had wept away last night all power of weeping.

She was as white as marble; but her beauty looked all the more pathetic for her grief, and even the *commissaire*—few people are less sentimental — was deeply moved when he questioned her.

Well, she knew little enough. She could not tell how much was taken from the till, she did not know what was in it.

She mentioned two curios that she missed, but she had only a limited knowledge of the stock, she was busy with her own profession. She was never in the shop, knew of no one likely to rob her father. She testified to his habits and those of the household generally; had not seen anyone about last night when she went to the theatre.

Then she was questioned about her own life.

Had she any lover?

She flushed at the question, but answered it quietly.

"No—no one."

The police spoke to the same end. Mlle. Jesuita had led a blameless life.

Old Marthe was examined, but could throw no light on the matter. The *sergent de ville* had noticed no suspicious character in the street.

Other witnesses were called with a like result. Nothing had been seen to excite suspicion. In truth, the crime was, in itself, commonplace enough; the only wonder was that Papa Guilbert had not been murdered long ago, when you came to think how easy it was, with that disreputable alley, too, opposite, to run down and hide oneself.

The old dealer's stock was sold, and the proceeds and the money he had saved made pretty Mlle. Jesuita quite a well-off young lady. She received (though she was not yet sixteen) many offers of marriage. The management of the Opera offered to double her salary, and the management of the Eden wanted her as *première danseuse*; the double attraction of her beauty and of her father having been murdered would be quite a "boom" for the management.

But Mlle. Jesuita turned a deaf ear to all offers, legitimate or otherwise, and disappeared from Paris; but within a year she came back and entered herself as a pupil of the Conservatoire, where she speedily became a favourite scholar, and carried off the first prize in tragedy.

But why had Jesuita Yvetot kept back from the police what she had heard about the handsome Englishman who came to the shop twice, and the second time bought a mere trifle, but chatted with Papa Guilbert?—the man, who, though he was a gentleman and dressed well and wore a diamond ring, had not much money; who, though he said he was going to Italy in the afternoon, was seen near the shop in the evening, and went down a very shady street. There might not be anything suspicious in all this—or there might be. Jesuita could not have forgotten it, surely? and certainly she could not have forgotten that she missed the Bronze Persephone; but she kept that to herself, too.

CHAPTER III.

MLLE. SAINT LYS.

"I HATE matinées," said the dramatist, laying down his cigarette, and leaning back in his chair.

He was a tall, slightly built, decidedly handsome man, with curly, dark hair and moustache, brilliant dark eyes, and finely-cut features; but, despite the grey on his temples, he did not look more than two or three and thirty.

"Naturally enough," said the young man—an ordinary-looking man of the journalistic type, to whom the above remark was made; "but you might come to this one."

"What's the attraction of this one, Clement?"

"This new girl—the French girl—Mlle. Saint Lys."

"Oh, yes!—I remember. I forgot for the minute whether she was playing in to-day's matinée, or Thomson's next week. But, my dear boy, you know as well as I do, what these 'new people' generally are. This girl isn't an amateur, certainly. She's a trained artist—has played in Paris—why didn't she stop there if she's so good?—but she isn't likely to compensate for sitting out a stupid piece."

"They say she's awfully good-looking."

"The new people always are," replied the other cynically; "and if she really is beautiful, she is so much more likely to act badly; the beauties generally do. However," he said rising, "I'll come with you, and if your Mlle. Saint Lys is a fraud, I'll hold you responsible."

"Very well," said Clement laughing, and Caerlyon went off to change his coat.

He joined his friend in a few minutes, and the two walked across to the Vaudeville where the matinée was. Caerlyon's chambers were in Adelphi.

The beginning of the first act promised fairly; towards the end Mlle. Saint Lys made her appearance. She had not what dramatists call an "effective" entrance, though she was playing the principal part in the piece. No matter, she made her own effect, without any aid from stage craft. She was young, she was beautiful, she was charming, she was an artist.

Clement said, "by Jove!" under his breath, and looked at Caerlyon. Other people, the men especially, applauded. It was spontaneous—the newcomer was so handsome, so altogether out of the common; but

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

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Caerlyon said nothing, and didn't applaud, he drew in his breath silently; he was moved to something more than admiration, but Clement saw only the admiration, and whispered, "What do you think of her, eh?"

Caerlyon half smiled. He didn't feel as if he could criticise just yet. He was of impassioned, emotional temperament, as an artist should be; and the face of that girl on the stage had touched deeper chords than calm criticism could reach; but he was the last man to give out the sound of those chords, being, as regarded his own inner life, intensely reserved. So he said:

"She is very beautiful. Her face would make her fortune, even if she couldn't act."

"You make sure she can act, then?"

"Of course. There's brain as well as heart and soul there."

The actress swept the scene and the audience along with her, whirled them up on the top of her passion, and made them weep with her pathos; it was verily a making of bricks with a modicum of straw, if not altogether without straw. The triumph was the artist's, not the dramatist's, and it was a complete triumph.

"Are you going round to be introduced to Mlle. Saint Lys?" asked Clement, as they rose.

"No, thanks. There'll be a dozen press men bowing and smirking about her. I'll keep my illusion for a little while."

Mlle. Saint Lys had an offer from a London manager the same day; it was not a big part—there was none such open, but it was worth playing, and she accepted it. She was to attend a rehearsal the next day at two o'clock.

She sat in her apartment the morning after the *matinée* and read the daily papers. She had taken rooms in Bloomsbury-square, because they were large and old-fashioned, and near the Strand. All the notices praised her—her beauty, her talents, her "sympathetic charm;" all prophesied for her a great future. She laid the last down and covered her face, the hot tears fell through her fingers.

"How proud and happy *chéri* would have been!" she whispered. "How he would have taken me to his heart and kissed me, and that would have made me happier than all that the whole world can say of me!" Then she lifted her face; a change had come over it—it looked stern and resolute, almost pitiless. "But I will never rest, father," she said, as if addressing a living being, her eyes gazed upwards, "until I have found your murderer and avenged you. I am here—in London—at last. Shall I find him? Is he the guilty man—the Englishman? How shall I know him? It seems so hopeless." She dropped her head in her hands again. "And yet I cannot help hoping. I know I shall one day find him. He said he was a dramatist; but that might not be true. He was tall and handsome—a dark man, and spoke perfect French; those are guides. But then, he may be innocent—perfectly innocent. Still, I shall find who is guilty, and I will not spare him. It is my right to avenge my father. Our Lady will help me to find his murderer."

CHAPTER IV.

Meeting.

"Is Mr. Darley here?" asked Caerlyon at the stage door of the Ionic Theatre.

"Yes, sir; he's on the stage, I think."

"A rehearsal?"

"Yes, sir."

Caerlyon went on, and in a minute was on the stage; and the first person he saw, coming out of the light into the semi-darkness, was Jesuita Saint Lys. She was standing by a table in the centre of the stage, going through a scene with the villain of the piece, of course reading her part. Darley, the manager of the theatre, was standing near the "T" piece with the stage-manager. A few other artists were standing about the wings, two or three looking sulky; actors hate to be called down to rehearse a piece they know backwards and forwards, just for the sake of a new comer.

Caerlyon's business was with the manager; but he paused at the side, waiting until the scene was over, and he was not sorry, for his own sake, to do so. It was something more than pleasure to watch Mlle. Saint Lys; but Darley saw him, and went up to him at once.

"You've lost no time," said Caerlyon, as they shook hands.

"No, indeed. I'm lucky, I take it; the town will go wild over her. I'll introduce you in a minute. She's reading the part charmingly. Did you want me, old fellow?"

"Only about that front piece; there's no hurry. I'll look on at the rehearsal."

"All right. The scene's over now. Come and be introduced. Mlle. Saint Lys——!" as they went forward; the girl turned, and glanced up in the dark, handsome face of the tall man by Darley's side.

"Mr. Caerlyon," said the manager, "I daresay you know his name. He speaks French as well as you do, and Castilian also."

The simple words sent a strange, swift shock to the girl's heart. Yes; she knew Caerlyon's name. She had seen a one-act piece of his abroad, which she had admired as a gem; and here he was before her—the dramatist, who spoke a Frenchman's French; who was tall and handsome, with dark eyes and dark, curly hair. Surely this was the man who came to the little shop in the Petite Rue Trois Etoiles! But an assassin—with that face, that mien! Impossible! Just a moment was the change in her face—a startled and pained look in the large eyes, which Caerlyon noticed and wondered at; then she held out her hand frankly, and said, in her pretty English:

"Of course, I know your name, Mr. Caerlyon. I saw a play of yours—in Berlin—and liked it so much."

"You are very good to say so, Mlle. Saint Lys. And what shall I say of your performance yesterday?"

"Pretty things—naturally—to my face," said she, with demure gravity. "What else?"

"To your face—or to anyone," he answered. "Only 'pretty things' won't cover the ground. I mean to say that I was simply charmed. You have your future in your own hands."

"You really think that?" said the young actress, with an earnestness, a manifest belief in the value of his judgment, which was clearly genuine.

"Don't you know it yourself?" Caerlyon said, smiling at her *naiveté*, marvelling how she had kept it till now, how long she would retain it.

"Not fully," she replied, with a touch of perplexity on her mobile features. "I feel so distrustful of myself, often."

"You have no cause to be, believe me; though some self-distrust is good for an artist. I must not detain

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

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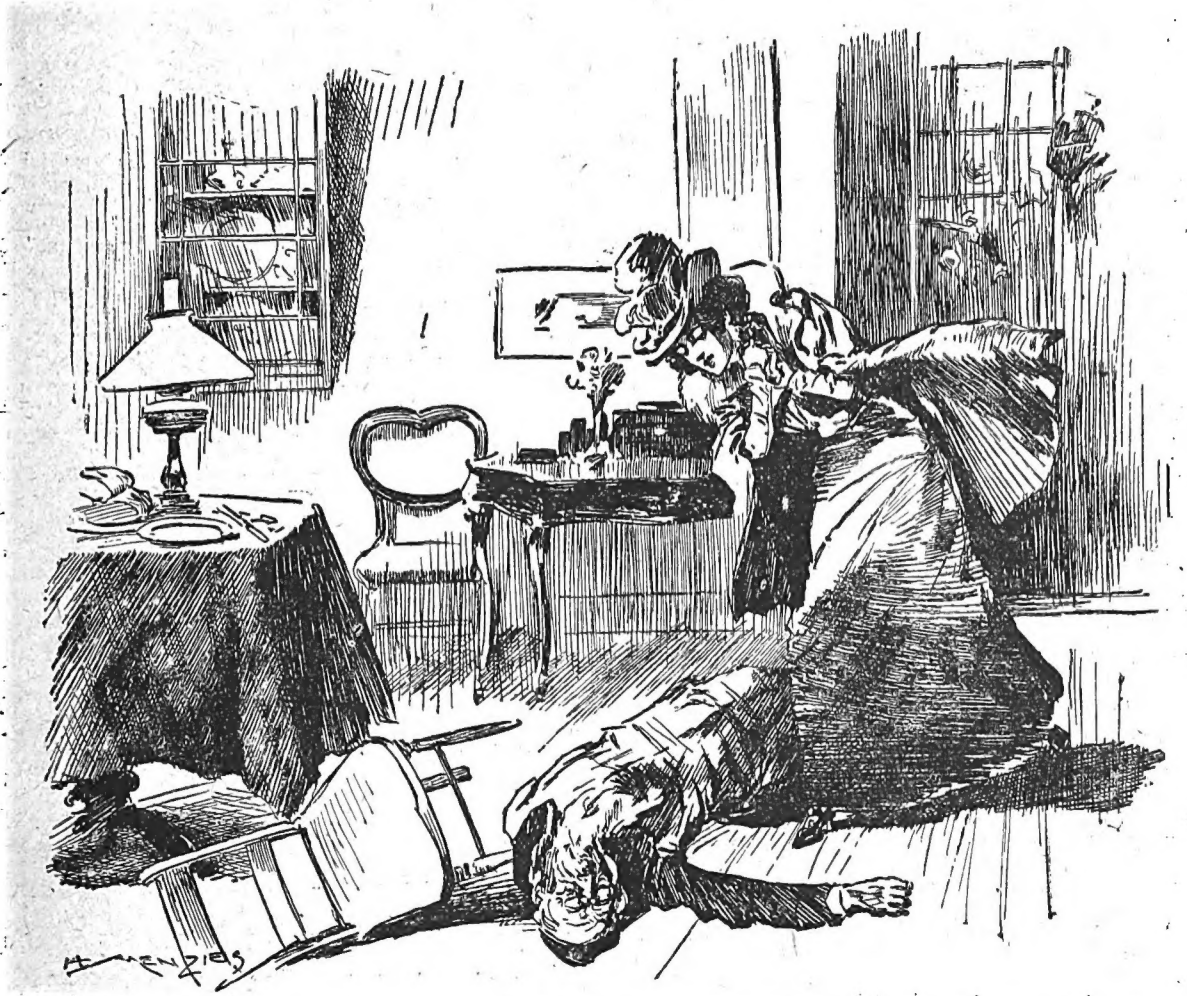

Then, with a choking cry, she flung herself down by the dark form lying prostrate on the floor.

you now. Perhaps I may have the pleasure of seeing you again when the rehearsal is over."

He bowed and turned away, and Jesuita went back to her work with a tumult of emotion in her heart.

Caerlyon got through his business with Darley during the rehearsal, and by that time it was over, and the dramatist went up to Jesuita again and walked with her out into the Strand. There they paused.

"I must run home to study," the girl said. "I play to-morrow night."

"I shall come and see you," Caerlyon said.

"The first night? I shall be nervous."

"Never mind; you will play well, all the same. Can I put you in a cab?"

"Thanks so much."

A hansom cab was near; the driver had his "weather eye" on the well-dressed couple, so it was only for Caerlyon to hand his beautiful young companion into the vehicle.

"What address?" he said, as she gave him her hand.

"99A, Bloomsbury Square. A thousand thanks, Mr. Caerlyon."

Then he released her, and, lifting his hat, turned away and gave the address to the driver.

The cab drove off, and Caerlyon walked to his chambers in Adelphi. He had work to do that afternoon, but he could not get on with it. Jesuita's face was between him and the paper; her words—all she had said, trivial or not—kept repeating themselves in his mind; the touch of her hand lingered in his.

He met the young artist on Sunday, at Darley's house. The rooms were crowded, and Jesuita was surrounded. Everybody wanted to speak to her, and Caerlyon at first made no attempt to get near her. Presently there was a break, and Caerlyon made his way to Jesuita's side. She turned and gave him her hand, with a bright smile.

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

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"I saw you when you came in, Mr. Caerlyon," she said, "but you were talking to someone at the time."

"And I," he said, "have been waiting my opportunity to get near you. But let me find you a seat. Have you had any tea or coffee?"

"Oh, yes, thanks."

Caerlyon found seats; they were somewhat out of the way of the crowd, and for that reason had perhaps, hitherto escaped observation, but they were so much the more attractive to Caerlyon; and Jesuita would have been quite content to spend the rest of the afternoon in his company. She did feel flattered, or rather, happy, that this gifted, brilliant man singled her out, as it were. Of course she knew she was beautiful, and that all men liked the society of a beautiful woman; but Caerlyon talked to her as if she had brains, and not merely a huge capacity for swallowing compliments.

"I am afraid," he said, as they rose, "that I have been playing the part of usurper. You must do your best to forgive me—mercifully considering the temptation."

"But, then, I have nothing to forgive, Monsieur," said the girl, "but a great deal to be grateful for!"

"Grateful?"

"Why yes. You have made the time pass so pleasantly, and it is so good of you to talk to me."

"Is it?" Caerlyon said, with a slight smile. "I think—if I am good at all—it is in resigning you to others."

A faint colour crossed the girl's cheek, but she laughed. "I prefer it my way," she said, as they moved slowly towards the principal room—they had been sitting in the back drawing-room.

"Very well," returned Caerlyon quietly, "I hope you will let me have the pleasure of calling upon you one day, Mlle. Saint Lys."

"I shall be very pleased, Monsieur. By-and-bye I must have an 'At Home' day; but I think I shall be at home in the afternoons for the present. I might have to be out——"

"Never mind, I must take my chance, and call again if you are out."

Then they mingled with the crowd, and Caerlyon did not speak to Jesuita alone during the remainder of the afternoon.

CHAPTER V.

A Gift.

"Mlle. Saint Lys!"

It was two days later, and Caerlyon and the actress came face to face in a street off Soho; she was just emerging from the low-browed shop of a curio-dealer. There was a flash of something more than pleasure in his dark eyes as he held out his hand; in hers, for a second, that odd, strained look he had noticed at their first meeting, and noticed again now; but it passed, and she smiled, giving him her hand over which his closed fast and close.

"Who would think of meeting you here?" he added smiling. "How did you find your way to such an out-of-the-way place?"

"I make inquiries and find out things!" she said. "I am fond of curios—but there was nothing in that shop I cared for."

"So you prowl about Soho, curio-hunting! Is that it?"

"Sometimes. I used to poke about among the curio shops in Paris. Do you care for such things?"

The question was put with a purpose; her eyes went to his face as she asked it.

"I don't know that I do care very much," he answered; something in the tone—or was it her fancy?—implied, "not *now!*" He added, almost directly:

"Am I detaining you? Where are you going—if I may ask?"

"To a curio shop in Greek Street—and then home."

"May I escort you to this curio shop?"

"Will you? That will be a great pleasure."

So they walked on to Greek Street, and at the door of the shop Jesuita paused.

"You will not come in?" she said. "I shall tire out your patience!"

"You could not!" he said, his hand on the door, and something in look and tone brought a quick throb to the girl's heart. "I will come in—if I may?"

"Oh, yes," she said, a little hurriedly, "only I was afraid you might be bored."

"There is no danger of that."

He opened the door and they entered the shop.

Jesuita certainly looked the stock well over, but she bought two or three things which were tolerably expensive, so the dealer had no cause of complaint, and Caerlyon stood watching her, and wishing he could buy any and all these things she admired, and give them to her.

"I shall have finished in a minute," Jesuita said, turning to her cavalier.

She had been rummaging at the opposite side of the shop.

"I am in no hurry for you to finish," said Caerlyon smiling. "I shall be sorry when you have done so."

She did not answer that, but bent over some things on the counter.

The dealer brought out a small, curiously-chased silver bowl.

"A gem, miss," he said. "It is from Spain—you see—underneath—the name and date—one hundred years old—and so beautiful! Only five pounds—that is very cheap."

Jesuita looked wistfully at the curio. She could see it was genuine; she knew a great deal about such matters, from her father; but she shook her head.

"No," she said. "I have enough for to-day. Put the things up, please."

"And the bowl with them," said Caerlyon, taking out his pocket-book. Jesuita flushed, and spoke in a quick undertone, in Castilian:

"Señor! you must not!—indeed, you must not!"

"You cannot deny me so small a pleasure!" he said softly, in the same language; and he gave a five-pound note to the delighted dealer.

"Ah, Señor!—it is so good of you!—but you take me at a disadvantage! What can I say?"

He laughed a little then.

"Is it unfair to snatch happiness when one can?" he said. "There is not too much of it in this world, is there?"

"And you give me some of what there is!" said Jesuita. "I don't know how to thank you!"

"You have done it—if thanks are needed—full measure, well pressed down."

He took the package from the dealer, and they went out into the street.

"Is it home now?" Caerlyon added. "Let me drive you up. I have almost to pass your door."

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

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That was an elastic way of putting it. His destination was a good bit wide of Bloomsbury-square; but Jesuita could not suggest that, even if she suspected it. He handed her into a cab, and took his place beside her, devoutly wishing that Bloomsbury was ten miles off instead of one, and that he could tell the cabby not to drive so fast! He asked Jesuita if she would be at home to-morrow afternoon, and she answered, yes.

"Then I will give myself the pleasure of calling," he said, "if convenient."

"Oh, yes!—quite convenient!" and then the cab stopped, and he sprang out and handed her down.

"And I must thank you again for that dear, old bowl!" she said, her hand in his.

"You honour me infinitely by accepting it," said Caerlyon; unconsciously his clasp tightened as he spoke.

Jesuita put down her treasures tenderly on the drawing-room table—the tenderness was for the silver bowl. Her lips were parted, in a half-dreamy smile; a strange, sweet tremor was thrilling through her veins. How happy she had been that morning, and she had not dreamed of being so; and to-morrow again!—and then, athwart the golden haze, rose a shadow—the vision of the little, dark, old-fashioned shop in the Palais Royal, and a dark, handsome man standing there, as he had stood in the shop to-day. Did he remember? Why should he? Yet—the tone in which he had answered the question. Did he care for curios? Oh, but what frightful thoughts to have of him! Noble, chivalrous, tender! What then? Was she at a deadlock?

"If I could only find the Bronze Persephone," she said, inwardly.

CHAPTER VI.

"JESUITA."

THE next two days Jesuita spent among the curio shops; the third she had to commence rehearsing for the *matinée*, for she found the part to be a good one, and the piece was far better than that in which she had made her London *début*.

She met Caerlyon as she came out from rehearsal, and they walked down the Strand together, she telling him about the play; and when they parted, he asked her if she had seen the piece at the St. James's—it was very good.

"Why don't you go on Saturday?" he added.

"Not this Saturday," said Jesuita. "I am going to see your play."

"You have seats?"

"Yes; I was going to write for them, but the stage-manager at the Ionic gave them to me."

"Do you know," said Caerlyon gravely, "you are treating me very badly? You were going to write for seats to the theatre—instead of asking me!"

"Monsieur! You are so kind already—and you must have so many people troubling you; it would be like an impertinence for me——"

"Hush! child; don't talk so!" Caerlyon interrupted in quick pain. "I can't bear it! Yes. I know how you felt; only, if you had asked me! Well, never mind"—as her colour rose and her eyes dropped—"I mustn't scold you here—in the Strand. Who are you going with on Saturday?"

"With Miss Morton, at the Ionic."

"You have asked her?"

"No, monsieur; I shall ask her to-night."

"Please, don't! Be very good to me! Let me take her place?"

The girl glanced up, under her long lashes, with a kind of flash in her dark eyes, a sort of quiver on her whole face; her heart spoke for her before her lips answered: "I shall be so pleased, monsieur!"

"Will you? Thank you so much! Then I will call for you. You can give away the seats you have; they won't be needed."

Then they separated, and Jesuita went home, walking in a haze of rainbow tints. And on Saturday—this was Thursday—Caerlyon came in a hansom, and they drove down to the theatre, where Caerlyon led his young companion to a grand tier box.

Unlike most authors, he had no particular pleasure in seeing his own plays; but he wanted to know what she thought of this one. For himself, all his pleasure was centred in her.

And Jesuita certainly enjoyed the play the more because Ernest Caerlyon had written it, though it would have delighted her whoever wrote it.

He leant back, watching covertly every change of the mobile features, as she followed, with absorbed interest, the action of the opening scene, and when the act-drop fell, she turned and met his smile.

"Oh, monsieur," she said with glowing eyes, "I like it so much!"

"I knew that, by your face," he said softly. "I am so glad—so glad that you like my work!"

In the second act, the interest, as it should do, deepened, and it closed in a powerful and pathetic scene.

Jesuita flung all her dramatic soul into the scene. Her lips trembled, her dark eyes burned, filled with tears; her colour went and came. She was as much excited as if she looked on reality; and Caerlyon, in the shadow, held his breath as he looked at her. And had she, in her profound interest in the play, forgotten him? Or was there a subtle sense of his presence, shedding—though she might not know it—its own glory on that scene on the stage?

She sat quite still when the curtain had gone down, too deeply stirred for word or movement, and Caerlyon knew far too well in himself what such emotions are, to break through the spell that was on her. But when she turned with a tremulous smile on her lips, but her eyes not meeting his full, he smiled too.

"You couldn't say more," he said, in that soft, almost caressing tone, "with any words your tongue could utter."

She shook her head.

"No," she answered in a half whisper, and paused.

"It is hard," he said in the same tone, "to come back to the everyday world."

"Yes." She spoke in a half-dreamy way. "Only—I don't seem to have come back—yet."

The curtain rose on the third act almost directly afterwards; but for a little while Jesuita did not know what went on on the stage.

When the act-drop fell, Caerlyon said nothing for a few minutes. The girl, too, was silent; her heart was beating fast; she had no power to break the silence that was so sweet, yet that, in a way, frightened her.

Then Caerlyon spoke in his gentle way. How did she like the heroine's part?

"A glorious part!" she said, half turning to him then.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

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"And you would play it gloriously," he answered; "but you are too young, that is all; you could not look a woman of thirty."

Jesuita flushed and caught her breath. Praise from him was incense indeed. All other praise seemed poor and worthless beside it. Would he, perhaps, one day write her a part? She dared not ask him now.

Caerlyon drove her back home. He would not relinquish her until he was compelled to do so, and on the way asked her if she was very busy just now. She answered, yes. To-morrow she must study her part in the *matinée* piece—a long part—for it was only ten days to the performance; the lady who was to have played had fallen ill; and there were the rehearsals and dresses to see to. Caerlyon bit his lip, but said, quietly:

"Well, I must try, in spite of all, to see you soon again. If you are too busy to see me, you must send me away."

"I couldn't do that," she said, in a low voice. "In a few days I shall have more time, perhaps."

A few days! A day seemed cruelly long to him—dividing him from Jesuita! But he said nothing of this, for the cab stopped just then, and so they must part. Jesuita knew he could not come in, for he had told her he had an appointment at twenty minutes past six, and it was six now, so they said good-bye on the step. It was a very close clasp he gave her hand.

"It is so hard," he said, in a sort of suppressed way, "to say good-bye, even for a little time. *Au revoir*"—he bent lower—"Jesuita!"

He dropped her hand, and turned away.

CHAPTER VII.

The Story of Persephone.

Hard to say good-bye—hard, indeed, for Jesuita, as for Ernest Caerlyon; hard to go down to the theatre and play; and, oh! hardest of all to study, with that soft, half-passionate "Jesuita" in her ears, in her heart; while she lived over again all that time of exquisite happiness with him, and wanted only to give herself up to dreaming—to bathe in "the light that never was on land or sea."

"He loves me—he loves me!" kept throbbing in her heart; and lines grew blurred and confused, and would not range themselves in her memory. How could they, when all that Caerlyon had said yesterday took their place? It took Jesuita longer to get part of the first act of that part in her head than to learn a whole play at any other time.

There was a rehearsal on Monday morning, but it was over before one—the stage was wanted for someone else and Jesuita took her way, before returning home, to a curio shop in Wardour Street, of which she had incidentally heard at the theatre,

The dealer had an immense collection, and Jesuita at once professed her liking for bronzes, of which she had seen several in the window and in the shop. The dealer, a French Jew, was ready to display his best wares; the lady was handsomely dressed—she evidently did not mind spending money.

"If mademoiselle will come upstairs," he said, presently, "I have some lovely bronzes."

And he led her up to a fair-sized room on the first-floor, where there were bronzes galore.

She looked at gods and goddesses, horses, stags, Jaccöons and saints, lamps and inkstands; and suddenly she caught her breath, and went white to the lips.

The dealer, moving some things to get at something he wanted to show her, was beginning, "Here, mademoiselle, is something——" But looked up at a movement from the customer, and saw that she had a little statuette in her hand, and was looking at it intently.

"This—Persephone!" she said—she spoke quietly, lifting her eyes—"how much is it?"

"That, mademoiselle—ah! that is a gem—twenty pounds. I could not take less. That is quite a bargain."

"I will have it," she said. She felt as if something were gripping her round the heart. She had found it at last—by a mere chance, as it seemed—the bronze Persephone! And now what would be the end? She almost shrank from asking the question that quivered on her tongue, yet it must be asked. She spoke with an effort, though it was not apparent. "Do you mind telling me who sold you this statuette, and how long you have had it?"

The man looked at her a little curiously.

"Mademoiselle knows the statuette?"

"Yes—it belonged once to a friend of mine—he must have sold it. I should like, if I can, to know to whom. There is no harm."

"Oh! mademoiselle, no. I have had it—it is now nearly nine months. A gentleman sold it to me."

"You can describe him?"

Her heart was throbbing heavily.

"Oh, yes. He was a man you would notice—very handsome, tall, with dark hair, curly hair and moustache—no beard or whiskers. And very distinguished looking."

Ernest Caerlyon! What could it mean? The description was the same Papa Guilbert had given! If Caerlyon had bought the statuette of anyone, he would not have sold it again. Yet there was scarcely a pause before Jesuita spoke again.

"Would you know this gentleman again?"

"Yes."

He looked interested. Was there some romance connected with the Persephone?

Jesuita drew out a photograph of Caerlyon, which she had bought in a shop—there was no name under it. She held it before the man.

"Yes," he said at once; "that is the gentleman who sold me the statuette."

"Thank you. Ah! then I understand," the girl said, with admirable self-control.

She gave the dealer the bronze to wrap up for her, and paid him for it in notes, taking her treasure with her. He whole soul was in a tumult. She could not believe Caerlyon an assassin; but how had the Persephone come into his possession? That could be accounted for, if it were not for his having sold it. He was not a needy man—nine months ago he was well off; he was a lover of art; he had wanted to buy this very statuette. Why should he sell it, and for what must have been to him a paltry sum?

If he bought it, it would not be to sell it again; if it was a gift, so much the more would he be bound to keep it. He knew something—he must know something—of the murder of Guilbert Yvetot.

Torturing thoughts, memories, came to the girl, to be hurled back with horror; but suspense, uncertainty, was unendurable—she must find out the truth. All that

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

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night she lay awake, every pulse in her body beating, her brain on fire.

What was she to do? How probe this mystery? And gradually thought shaped itself from an idea, essentially dramatic, that sprang to her mind.

"He knows the truth," she said to herself, her lips parched, her eyes burning. "He shall tell me, or I will never see him again—and he loves me! Though I should break my heart I will avenge my father!"

There was no rehearsal to-day. She would anticipate any chance of Caerlyon calling in the afternoon. She wrote a brief letter to him:

DEAR MR. CAERLYON,

Can I see you to-day, if possible, on a matter of business? Shall I call upon you, or will you call here—any time in the afternoon? Please forgive me for troubling you.

Yours faithfully,
JESUITA SAINT LYS.

That letter puzzled Caerlyon not a little. It seemed somehow—and yet he could hardly tell why—a strange letter for Jesuita to write to him, especially after all that had passed between them on Saturday; but he telegraphed that he would be with her by three o'clock, and waited with what patience he might, torturing himself, as lovers are wont to do, with all manner of fears and conjectures.

And to Jesuita the time of waiting was far more terrible. How would Caerlyon meet her—how would she meet him? It is so useless thinking of such things in these crises of our lives, and yet we always do it, and never by any chance act as we imagined we should do.

Jesuita started with a rush of almost sickening emotion, as she heard a cab stop outside. But she did not move from where she stood, near the window. She heard the door close, steps on the stairs, then the room door opened, and the servant said, "Mr. Caerlyon," and he was in the room. She turned then, and went forward to meet him, but something in her face checked the almost passionate words on his tongue, though he caught her hand in both his.

"Jesuita!" he said, involuntarily, "what is it—what has happened?"

"What should have happened?" She drew her hand away. "Please sit down, I wanted to—to ask you something."

"Ask me what you will, only don't speak to me like that. Jesuita, I——"

He would have taken her hand again, but she drew back.

"No, no!" she said, almost vehemently. "Let me speak to you first—it is an idea I have."

She swept her hand over her forehead.

"Will you sit down, please?"

Caerlyon looked at her sorely perplexed, as well he might be, his cheek paling. What strange mood was this? But he must for the present yield to it.

He did not sit down, but drew back to the mantelpiece, leaning on it.

Jesuita sat down in a low chair opposite. It was better like this, she felt, then if he was more on a level with her.

She bent her head, clasping her hands round her knee.

"I have been thinking," she began, "what you said on Saturday, about that part; and you have told me before that I could do anything. Well, I wanted to ask you if—if you would write me a play."

"Is that all?" said Caerlyon, with a quick indrawn breath; and yet he felt, in his heart, it was not all. "You only anticipate me; it is what I long to do, what I mean to do."

"Yes—yes!" she said hurriedly. "But I want a play written partly on my own idea—a story, at least, part of a story, that I have in my mind—and you might not like to do that."

"I would do anything for you that it is possible to do," said Caerlyon, more and more puzzled, yet resolved to let this scene, as he would have put it dramatically, "play itself out." "What is the story?"

"It is fragmentary—of course, it would need working out. I can only give the opening idea ——"

"Yes—go on!"

She caught in his tone the strain of suspense, and it made her task yet more difficult; but she obeyed, speaking hurriedly:

"The story should open with a murder!" she did not lift her head; she dared not look at Caerlyon—"an old man is discovered dead—stabbed to the heart! It is in France—in Paris; the old man is a dealer in curios—works of art, and so on. He lives a blameless life; there seems no motive for the crime ——"

"A rather melodramatic idea!" said Caerlyon, calmly, as she paused. "Yes?"

"Suspicion, of course, points to the hero," Jesuita went on, "who is—guiltless. But he has been to the shop; he has asked the price of certain things and has not been able to buy, saying, at any rate, that he could not afford them. On another occasion he has called and talked for some time with the old man, seemingly to find out when he was likely to be alone. On the night of the murder ——"

She stopped, for Caerlyon had made an involuntary movement then. Her eyes crept upwards to his face; it was bent down, shaded by his hand; but something about it gave her a sense of tension in the man. Her breath failed her for a moment. Caerlyon broke the pause.

"Are you speaking," he said, in a quiet, level voice, "of some real case?"

"One might think of such things," the girl answered.

"Oh! yes. Go on from where you stopped."

"On that night," she said, "the old man had seen the man who is accused of the murder; but the man is not taken at the time. There is a clue of which only one person knew at the time——"

"What person?"

"Why, naturally, the heroine. The till has been robbed and several objects of art stolen; among them is one which is not mentioned to the police or to anyone——"

She stopped again.

"What is it?" Caerlyon said, without moving.

"A little bronze statuette of Persephone."

She rose as she spoke, stretching out her hand to a little table near her. For a second her eyes met Caerlyon's full; his face was ashen white, even his lips are bloodless.

"And who," he said, slowly—the words came in a hoarse whisper—"who is the heroine?"

"Guilbert Yvetot's daughter—and the bronze Persephone is here."

She placed it on the mantelpiece before him. He looked at it—at her.

"Great heaven!" he said, under breath, and as he

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moved, staggered slightly. He caught the back of a chair near him, and dropped into it, covering his face. There was a minute's deathly silence. Then Jesuita made a step towards him; he lifted his face.

"Do you think," he said slowly, "that I am guilty?"

She flung herself on her knees at his feet.

"No! no!" she broke out, almost wildly. "Not that! never that! But you know who is guilty! Tell me who it is—tell me!"

Caerlyon took her hands in his, holding them fast.

"The man is beyond your vengeance," he said, "beyond all vengeance. He is dead."

"Dead?" She looked into the speaker's agonised face. "Dead!" she repeated. "But who—who?"

"My brother!"

He dropped her hands, and rose; the girl started to her feet with a smothered cry.

"Your brother!" she repeated. Her hand was at her throat; she felt choking. She sank down in the fauteuil, trembling like a leaf.

Caerlyon made a step nearer to her.

"I only knew it when he was dying," he said. "He sent for me and confessed his crime. I'll keep back nothing from you now. You shall know the whole truth; you have a right to know it."

He was close to her now; she did not shrink from him. He sank to his knee by her side.

"Jesuita," he said passionately, "is there blood between us? Does my brother's sin part us?"

"Darling! No! no! You are guiltless!"

She turned to him, and as he gathered her to his breast, wrapping her close, she clung to his neck sobbing.

"My love! my love!" Caerlyon said brokenly, and again and again his quivering lips pressed hers, she giving herself up to him in perfect faith, in love that never questioned or doubted.

By-and-bye, when both had grown a little calmer, Caerlyon spoke again, very low and tenderly, caressing the dear head laid on his heart.

"Dearest, let me tell you now that terrible story! Can you bear to hear it?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Tell me; but, oh! how you have suffered!"

"Suffered——!" He broke off and bowed his head for a moment on hers. "But if you had turned from me," he went on after a pause, "I could not have endured—I could not. Jesuita, look into my eyes—let yours tell me. There is no shrinking in your heart from me for that hideous wrong to you?"

"You know it," she said passionately, "you know it!" But she lifted her eyes to his, and all her soul went out to him in the look he met.

Then he told her that miserable story of how the bronze Persephone came into his possession.

"My brother Bernard," he said, "two years younger than I, was always an idler and a profligate. There were only he and I—no other brothers or sisters. In our youth we lived a great deal abroad; and before I came to England, Bernard had left home. He got involved in some shameful entanglement, and I managed to get him out of the way. That is how scarcely anyone I know in England was aware I ever had a brother; those who did know thought he was dead, and I did not undeceive them. Heaven knows I tried my utmost to redeem him, Jesuita, but it was thankless work. He was only happy in low haunts, among his inferiors, who made much of him, and thought his superficial cleverness talent. He sank lower and lower, and at last I lost sight of him altogether. I tried to find him, but failed, for I would never have let him want, or descend to crime, for the sake of bread. For the honour of our name I would have warded off the last. It was I, Jesuita, who went to Papa Guilbert's shop. I remember the old man well, and the Persephone I admired, but could not buy. But it was not I, it was Bernard, he saw near the house on the evening of that terrible day. Bernard was nearly of my height, but not like me otherwise; but his figure, seen in the dusk, might easily be mistaken for me by anyone who knew me imperfectly. I went to Italy that afternoon. I read the first account of the crime, but missed the rest. The matter seemed to have no very special interest for me, and I was very busy at the time. I remember a daughter being mentioned, but forgot it later."

Involuntarily he pressed the girl's yielding form closer to him, and was silent a minute before he went on.

"Two years ago, I received a letter from a priest in Rome. My brother was dying; I went at once. Bernard was dying in a poor lodging-house in the Trastevere. To him he had already confessed what he told me. He was in Paris three years before, herding with gamblers—and worse. He was poor, he grew desperate. He heard at first by chance of Papa Guilbert and the secluded life he led. He made further inquiries, and found that robbery would be comparatively easy. But he vowed to me, Jesuita—he was a dying man—that he had not intended to commit murder. Yet he took a murderous weapon with him, for self-defence, he said. Still I dare not believe he was anything but reckless as to whether he took life or not. When he knew Papa Guilbert to be alone, he entered the shop and shut the door. The old man, instantly suspicious, made an exclamation, and Bernard sprang upon him——!"

He stopped abruptly. Jesuita was clinging to him, trying to keep back her bitter weeping, trying, too, to soothe the man she loved, in his anguish. How awful a burden he had had to bear! Murder wrought by his own flesh and blood—his mother's son!

"Your father died—without a groan," Caerlyon said, almost in a whisper. "Bernard, panic-stricken when the deed was done, robbed the till, and seized a few of the smaller curios in the shop, among them that bronze Persephone, and fled. But the crime was his own death-blow; he lived in an eternal terror, tortured by remorse; the things he had stolen he dared not part with, or even throw away—he kept them. So he came to his death-bed. Then he gave these things to me, to do with what seemed best to me. To restore them to the rightful owner was impossible; I did not know who that owner was; and how could I confess the story of my brother's crime—the foul blot on my father's name? The money value was not great. I did at least what seemed best to me. I could not keep things stolen; I could not restore them. I sold them, and sent the money to the good priest who heard my brother's confession, for the church, or for the poor, as he should judge. That is the story, Jesuita, of the bronze Persephone."

She did not speak for a long time; she only clung to her lover's breast, giving and taking comfort. So vengeance was, after all, taken out of her hands, and her

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

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own life given to the man who was flesh and blood of her father's murderer. But would Papa Guilbert, who so loved his child, have wished it otherwise?

By-and-bye, when she could speak, Jesuita told Caerlyon of her quest, and of her strange conviction that she would one day find the Persephone, and that it would prove the clue to the truth.

"But why," Caerlyon asked, "did you keep back all you knew from the police?"

"Why?"—her dark eyes flashed—"I wanted to keep vengeance in my own hands. I knew how such crimes are punished in France. They would easily find excuse for the murderer, and he would be sent to prison or to New Caledonia for a few years. Heaven took vengeance away from me, Ernest. It was better so," she said, laying her head on his breast, and he held her to him, and kissed her in silence.

* * * * *

The play was written for Jesuita Saint Lys, but she was the author's wife before it was even commenced; and it was certainly not written on the lines she had suggested. It is now running at a leading theatre to crowded houses, and Jesuita is the most admired, most popular actress in London. But she remains unspoiled. She loves her art; she loves applause—what true artist does not. But her husband's smile of approval is worth it all, and her happiest hours are the hours spent with him—her true Elysium, to sit by his side while he works, or rest within his arms, leaning on his heart.

The murder in the Petite Rue Etoiles remains, and will ever remain, upon the roll of undiscovered crimes. Only three living people, an old priest of the Trastevere, and Ernest Caerlyon and his young wife, know the story of the bronze Persephone.

"THEY say very few authors sleep more than seven hours a day." "But think how much slumber they provide for other people!"

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CARMILITA.

"You wouldn't think now," said Inspector Robert Bruce, of the N.S.P.C.C., (popularly known among us as "Bobby B."); "that innocent little mites of children would have such tragical life-stories, as I know from personal experience, many of them do have."

"Have you any particular one in your mind?" said I.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have; and one, too, that shows up a certain sort of human, or rather inhuman nature, in a way hardly conceivable."

"Let us have it, then, Bobby," said I; (I don't know why, but somehow I am generally looked for to act as spokesman on these occasions); "The 'cry of the children' is just now being not uncertainly heard, and you, of all people, ought to know something about it worth the telling."

"Yes, poor little beggars!" said Bobby B., sadly meditative; "I ought to know, and I do know. Sometimes—very often, in fact—I wish that I didn't, for it makes me not only sorrowful for the helpless, but to lose all faith in my fellow-man, as being a good and true example of his Maker's image!"

Bobby B. is, I think, one of the kindest-hearted creatures on all God's earth. The proverbial fly is in no danger from him, children, animals all love him, and he them.

It is with the mature cruelty, hiding its unseemly doings in the "dens and caves" of the stately capital of the world, that he wages ceaseless, and relent'ess war. His "no quarter may well be bracketed with Grant's famous "Unconditional Surrender," for he implicitly believes in thoroughness; and that the detection and due punishment of the guilty, is the only way of Salvation for the innocent.

The following story: (true with the truth of fact) from his own lips, will exemplify this better than can any description I may be able to give of him.

* * * * *

"About two years ago," said Bobby, "at the close of the year, all amusement-loving London were going literally mad over the wonderful acrobatic, and sensational trapeze performances of a girl—a mere mite of ten.

"The child was certainly in her way a genius; accomplishing, as she did, equilibristic feats that would have put to shame the best efforts of any adult artiste in the same line, then before the public.

"She was a winsome little creature, small, and tiny-limbed; but altogether without that sadly sterotyped professional smile, so typical of her class, little or big, and which to my mind is so pathetic, in that it may hide a sorrowful and aching heart.

"I don't know that I should have particularly interested myself in Carmilita, (her stage name,) though I must confess to having from the first thought the child to be somewhat thin and delicate-looking; and therefore, to all appearance, but little fitted for the strain and excitement of such a life; but that something I happened accidentally to hear concerning her awoke in me a desire to inquire a little into her history.

"It seemed that she was presumably the youngest of the three children of one, James Passmore, and Guiletta his wife; the woman being, as her name indicates, an Italian.

"It was not known exactly where the family lived, beyond the fact that they invariably came from and returned to some neighbourhood in the S.E. district.

"It was from the theatrical agent who did all their business that I got my information, but he could not really tell me much, except with regard to one point, viz., that the wardrobe-woman of the 'Odeon' had been heard to say that, while preparing the child for the stage, the mother would allow no one connected with the theatre (the largest variety house in town,) to be present, and that it was just the same at the close of the 'turn.'

"This set me thinking.

"Where there is unnecessary concealment, there is almost sure to be wrong-doing of some sort; something of which folks are ashamed.

"I was a bit suspicious of this class of people: such, I mean, as have a child, or children upon the stage. I have an idea, indeed, that somebody is making all the profit, while the little performer is doing all the work.

"Besides there have appeared, from time to time, strange revelations in the newspapers; showing how that boys and girls of tender age lead lives of hard, grinding, cruel slavery; the taskmasters being ex-gymnasts; acrobats; circus-riders; who during the best years of their little victims lives, drain the very last drop out of their endurance and intelligence.

"The other side of course, deny all this, and equally of course, it is open to me, and those who think with me, to take the denial as being genuine—or, the other thing.

"My first step was to attend a performance at the 'Odeon,' so that I might study 'Carmilita' at her business and to the best advantage.

"I could not but admire the gracefulness, and neat cleverness of the girl; but I was also peculiarly struck with her strange lack of healthy, wholesome freshness.

"I could see, through my glasses, her poor little arms quiver and tremble to a painful degree, as she threw the whole weight of her body upon them, when raising herself by sheer muscular power from a hanging to a sitting position on the bar of the trapeze.

"Too, I could see, plainly, the little lips whiten and droop at the corners, until my heart was sore with pity for the child.

"And yet it was not Carmelita alone that I watched and studied.

"Superintending the performance was a man in irreproachable evening dress, even to white kids, and with an expensive flower in his coat.

"A big man; brawny of breast and limb—swarthy to; and given to an ugly contraction of brow.

"This was, of course, James Passmore himself, who, however, contrived to preserve an appearance of fatherly tenderness of manner; a hovering protectiveness, which, to the majority of the audience may have seemed

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excessively charming, but which did not in the least deceive me.

"I was in the stalls, on the extreme left of the fourth row.

"'Q'vite—vat you call—marv'lleuse! eh!'

"The voice in my ear, the suddenness of it, startled me.

"Evidently the speaker, a foreigner, was immediately behind me.

"'I beg pardon!' I said, half turning my head.

"'Carmilita! is she not *une belle charmante*?'

"I am ever suspicious of strangers—especially foreigners—and mistrust them, and the glance I had of this somewhat obtrusive specimen, served but to confirm me in my prejudice—or opinion—which ever you like to call it.

"He let me alone for the remainder of Carmilita's turn; but upon its conclusion began again.

"'You know heem, M'ssieu Jims Passmore? *Sacré!* vat a spich is yours! it makes me to pain my tongue! So!'

"Upon finding that I did not answer him, he went on.

"'Ze large man vith Carmilita,' he said, Charmante Carmilita! You not know heem?' (Here he leaned over closer to me, and whispered me, speaking rapidly). 'I know heem! Vat you vatch heem for so close? Come outside. I tell you then all about Jim Passmore. You vill come?'

"I did not by any means like the look of my interlocutor, but I saw in a flash, that of his mouth, I might learn what I sought.

"'Certainly,' I said, rising, 'wherever you please.'

"'Dis vay! dis vay!' he whispered excitedly, and followin' him I speedily found myself outside the theatre, and in the wet street.

"My companion led me up by the side of the building to opposite a small, ill-lit, narrow entrance, the 'stage door,' in fact.

"In the shadow of the shuttered shops, we had a fair view of anyone passing out of the theatre.

"There was a brougham waiting with—on the box—a large professional costume basket.

"'Dat is hers—Carmilita's!' said the Frenchman softly. 'Now, vatch you! and you vill see!—you vill see!'

"Presently Passmore came out carrying the girl—a bundle of shawls and wraps, her face, deadly white, alone being visible—in his arms. Close behind him was the woman.

"Depositing his burden—none too tenderly, as I thought—upon the back seat, and, handing in his wife, he got in himself. It was what I saw by the light of the street lamp while the carriage was in the act of moving away from before the door, that told me, unmistakably, that I was on the track of a crime.

"The moment he had fastened the door, after taking his seat, I distinctly saw him take the child by the throat, shake her savagely, as does a bull-dog a rat, and deliberately strike her with his other, and clenched hand, a terrific blow upon the side of the head.

"The Frenchman at my side saw it as well as I, and, as the vehicle disappeared up the narrow street in the direction of Waterloo Bridge, he hissed in my ear:

"'You see! You see! Vell, I vill tell you more! me! André Secompt vill tell you of dat *canaille*—dat *cochon*—vat you call—peeg! Yes!'

"And truly his revelation, while it in no sense surprised me, certainly affected me powerfully.

"It was to the following effect.

"Passmore, it seems, had at one time been a 'strong man' in the same travelling circus company in which Secompt figured as 'droll'

"The two men in course of time became, well, not exactly friends, but—social intimates.

"Passmore, who was the husband of the 'star lady-rider' of the troupe, Guiletta Simondi, had two children, who, from a professional point of view, were a source of bitter disappointment to him.

"He could make nothing of them. They evinced—poor little souls!—no aptitude for any recognised line of 'business.' Whip them! Kick them! Starve them! The result was the same—a blank!

"Both he and his wife were past their youth, and were looking forward to a near termination of their course as active members of the profession.

"That they could depend upon their childrens gains, as a future means of livelihood, was now out of the question.

"Casting about for a likely substitute for their own unprofitable offspring they were not long in meeting with their opportunity.

"It was at Nimes, the last pitch Saroni's Circus was to make on fair French soil, before returning across the Channel for the English touring season.

"'*Hola!*' said Saroni to Guiletta, the day before departure. 'Vere you get de nice leetle "*enfant*" eh?'

"'Vich you mean?'

"'De fair-'air *petite*!'

"'Ah!—si!—si!—cara Carmilita!—si! she is my bambino!—my leetlest one!'

"'Dat so!' said Saroni, puzzled. 'Vere you 'ide her all dis long time—eh?'

"'My sister—in Milan—come back last night,' said Guiletta, a trifle confusedly.

"'*Ah—bien!*—she is charmante, the leetle Carmilita! Yes!'

"Guiletta moved away, as having had enough of the conversation; Saroni just muttering: 'Ver' strange!—from Milan, last ni'!—*Non!*—*bien*; *pauvre petite!* she vill 'ave ze bad time vith Guiletta—yes!'

"This little encounter had taken place in the ring during morning rehearsal.

"Quietly turning somersaults in a corner, on a square of old soft carpet, Andre Secompt, the 'droll,' appeared to be absolutely unconscious of everything in his vicinity.

"The others gone, however, he sat down; his legs tucked under him, the fingers of his left hand slowly stroking his chin in a meditative way, the while a peculiar smile played about his eyes and lip corners.

"'Cara Carmilita!—*bou!* Ah! *mon chere* Jims you not know I know. Zat Madame in ze *Rue d'Etoiles*; she veep dis morning for her leetle *fille*. I say not'ing,—I—*Non*. Some time I speak! and zen! look out you! *mon cher* Jims!—but yes!'

* * * * *

"During the telling of his story, Secompt fidgeted and shook with excitement.

"I couldn't quite make out why he should be so exercised in spirit.

"'Has this man, Passmore, ever injured you in any way?' I asked him.

"'Injure me! But yes! He marry Guilette!' spat

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

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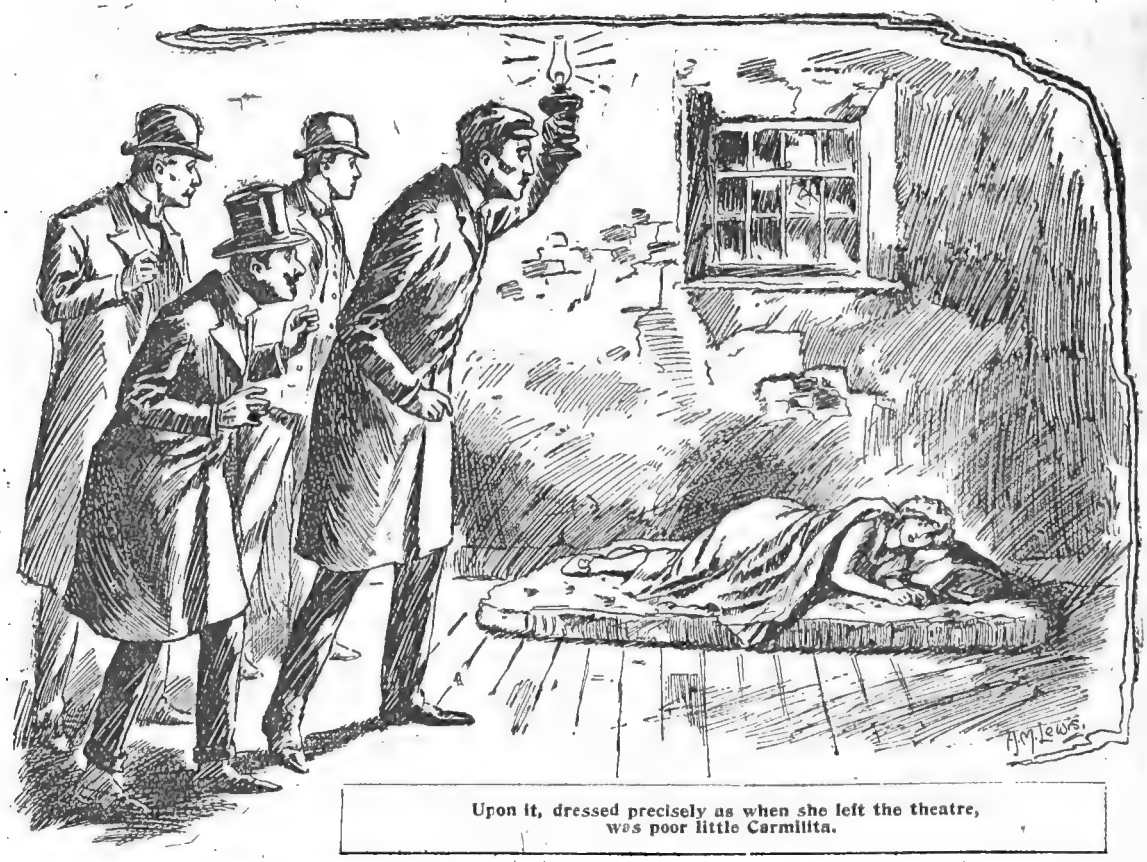

Upon it, dressed precisely as when she left the theatre, was poor little Carmilita.

out the ex-droll, his teeth grinding viciously. 'He play "faro" and cheat! cheat! cheat! He rob me of my moneys! me! I would kill heem!'

"'No, you mustn't say such things,' said I, 'or you'll be locked up.'

"'It is that he should be locked up!' almost screamed the infuriated Frenchman. 'But come, my friend! come! Tere is something more for you to see! Come!'

"'Hold!' I interrupted him. 'Steady, man! just tell me where we are going?'

"'Going! to save de *pauvre* Carmilita! to make vat you call sving, *mon cher* Jims!'

"'Well, then, look here, wait a moment! I want to see someone I know! Get you a cab—a growler—wait at this corner for me, I shan't be ten minutes.'

"'Renton!' cried I, breathless; 'you are not on duty, I see!'—he was just putting on his coat in the hospital vestibule. 'Come with me, there's a good fellow! Now—at once!—it's a matter, for all I know, of life and death!'

"'All right, Bobby! I'm your man. Lead on, and—explain afterwards.'

"Diving into a certain restaurant, I found, (as I knew I should find him at this hour,) Detective Inspector Manacle, enjoying a 'chop and chips.'

"'I want you!' was all I said to him, and he, with the alacrity of discipline, rose and joined us on the instant.

"In the cab now, with Secompt, who, in the company of my two friends, (one of whom, I see, is listening to me now,) became suddenly silent.

"'You have told the man where to drive to?' I put to him.

"'But yes!'

"It was a long journey; and a chilly one; for the night was cold, and misty, though the rain had ceased.

"Over Westminster Bridge; along Kennington Park; and past the 'Gate' where the busses and trams stop.

"A little way up the Brixton Road, and then a sharp turn to the left up a bye-street of villa built houses of a fairish size and style.

"The street was not a long one, a cul-de-sac in fact. At the fourth house down, something special was evidently afoot.

"Lights gleamed in every window from top to bottom of it, while sundry hansoms and a few single-horse broughams set down festively-garbed people one after another.

"At Secompt's signal, our vehicle stopped at the first house in the street.

"We all got out; I telling the cabman to wait for us just round the corner in the main road.

"'Can I see Mr. Passmore?'

"'No, I don't think you can,' said the servant. 'We've a party on to-night, and he's busy.'

"The house appeared to be well, and even handsomely furnished and appointed.

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's page.

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"Through the half-open dining-room door, I could just see a gorgeously-spread supper table shimmering beneath an electric light chandelier, with the glitter of silver, and sparkling crystal.

"Flowers were everywhere; and from above came the strain of a lovely waltz, mingled with the hum and chatter of a throng of people.

"Secompt and the two others had remained outside, a couple of doors off.

"'My business is urgent,' I said. 'Give Mr. Passmore my card, and I am s——'

"'Hullo! what's the matter? Who's this? I can't see anybody! Shut the door!'

"It was Passmore, flushed with wine and, perhaps, with a presentiment of coming evil.

"'Pardon me!' I said, maintaining my ground, 'but I think you had really better see me.'

"'I'll be d—d if I do! Why should I? Who are you?' and the bully in the man showed not only in the tone of his voice, but in the savage thrusting of his clenched fists in my face.

"'Well,' said I, 'since you elect to take things in this way, I must needs do my duty in my own.'

"A shrill call on my whistle, and Renton and the Inspector ran up the steps into the hall.

"It would take too long for me to tell everything in detail that then happened.

"After a lot of trouble, and no end of obstruction from Passmore's male guests who by this time had interested themselves in what was going on, we made our way to the top of the house, halting at length before a closed garret door.

"It was locked.

"Kicking it open with a vigorous application of my right foot, I pushed into the room.

"The contrast with the downstairs display, was simply appalling.

"There was absolutely nothing in the room (which was abominably dirty) beyond a mattress (none too clean) on the bare floor.

"Upon it, dressed precisely as when she left the theatre, was poor little Carmilita; for all the world as though she had been dumped down and left.

"But a closer inspection disclosed a state of things more serious.

"Renton, after a hurried examination, found that in addition to the child being in a dangerously advanced stage of consumption, she was literally a mass of sores and bruises from head to foot.

"These the doctor pronounced to be the result of beating with some heavy instrument.

"Wrapping her in his Inverness cloak, Renton carried her in his arms down to the hall, where we found the way barred by Passmore and his wife.

"'Vere you take my child?' cried Guiletta.

"'You will know to-morrow,' I answered her meaningly. 'Let us pass please!'

"Probably we should have had more difficulty than we actually did have, but for Secompt, who hitherto in the background, now pressed forward, and confronted the pair.

"'*Mon cher* Jims!' he said, suavely, but very white. 'Madame Dardique—you know her, eh? *Rue d'Etoile. Nismes*, you know her?'

"There was no need for further fighting, both the man and his wife, seeming to shrink with fear and apprehension.

"Womanlike, however, Guiletta had the last word.

"'You think you win ze trick!' to Secompt, who just smiled in quiet derision, 'but we shall see who vins ze game!—beast!'

* * * * * *

"The precious couple disappeared the next day not only from their house, but from all their haunts; so that the summons issued at the instance of the 'Society' fell abortively to the ground. In the interests of justice it was a pity, for if ever wrongdoers deserved the due reward of their evil deeds it was this pair.

"After all, however, it didn't much matter; we had the child, and that was the main thing.

"In due course Carmilita, or rather Adele Dardique was handed over to her mother's care, that lady having arrived in London, in quick response to my telegram.

"Madame Dardique then told me how that Adele's nurse had taken the child to see the show, and had suddenly missed her. Every inquiry as to the little one's whereabouts was fruitless, and until my communication, following hard upon Secompt's repentant information to the bereaved mother, nothing had been ever heard of her.

"The 'droll,' for his share in the business, was not forgotten, his almost criminal long-silence being quite forgiven. He was not at bottom a bad fellow, and in the end fully deserved the substantial appreciation he subsequently received.

"The public, of course, wondered for the usual nine days' over Carmilita's absence from the 'Odeon' programme, but were vouchsafed no satisfaction from either the management or from us.

"Marvellous to say, the child took a favourable turn that night; for following the course of treatment advised by Renton; now becoming widely known as a phthisis specialist, progress towards complete recovery was sure and rapid.

"Only a week ago I received this from Madame Dardique:—

"'Adele is becoming a perfect romp, and sends her love and kisses with both hands to dear M'ssieu Bruce and M'ssieu Renton.'"

GET THE ROYAL FOR JULY

Next Saturday.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode attempts to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

Notwithstanding their alarm, the police-officer—one Inspector Brasher—has merely called to arrest, on suspicion of being concerned in Sir Christopher's death, a certain Edward Spencer, a young Irish groom whom the baronet, shortly before his death, had given notice to leave. Protesting his innocence, Spencer is taken away. While on the route to the little country police-station, he was seen by Foley, with whom Dr. Kraft has been holding a mysterious consultation. Almost immediately afterwards, Foley, by chance, makes the acquaintance of Neal Garland. "Here, my hearty," asks the sailor in his maritime lingo, "what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?" He is referring to the meeting of Judith and Neal at the stile.

The scene changes. During a walk in the meadows on a pleasant Sabbath morning, Felix tells Esther that he was indeed in Wyresdale that fatal evening, and explains his return. A new sensation interrupts their conversation, Felix is called to the small local police-station. It has a single cell, and in this Ted Spencer had been confined over an adjourned inquest. This cell is now empty, Spencer has vanished. The barred window has been broken through—from the outside!

With the help of Neal, Esther kidnaps little Brian Dering, to further her ends with Felix.

CHAPTER X.

Caleb Forester is Indiscreet.

"Wilful murder against Edward Spencer,"

The afternoon sunshine was streaming through the front of Caleb Forester's shop in a golden shower, tinged here and there with the colours of the large ornamental flasks behind the upper panes. A crimson bar fell on the stern, self-satisfied features of Inspector Brasher, and seemed to bathe his palms in blood as he rubbed them together. It was he who had spoken.

"Just so," remarked Archibald Geddes, pausing, with his finger on the lever of his pharmaceutical scales, to peer round the edge of the wooden screen which hid the dispensary table. "And allow me to say, Inspector," he added, as he tilted the drug he had been weighing on to a piece of white paper, "that the verdict is an outrage upon the intelligence of Wyresdale. Luckily, it's nothing but the view of a coroner's jury."

The Inspector fingered his smart black beard.

"You'll be telling me next, Mr. Geddes," he observed drily, "you're glad the station strong-room was broken into and Spencer helped off."

Geddes sniffed and proceeded to fold the last of a set of teething-powders.

"I can't say I'm overpleased by that fact," he owned; "till you catch the poor lad again there can't be a trial, and I imagine a trial would be most interesting. Yet I'd lay odds it wouldn't have been Spencer who'd have been found guilty."

Inspector Brasher leaned on the long glass case at his

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back that, stacked with bottles and packets, formed the counter of the establishment.

"You're obstinate, Mr. Geddes," he said; "even for a Scotchman you're obstinate. But answer me this: If Sir Christopher's groom wasn't responsible for his master's death what did he want to escape for?"

Archibald Geddes began to write a label.

"Perhaps," he looked up to suggest, "you should ask the person who got those bars out of the strong-room window and persuaded Spencer to take flight. Not that you or I would need much inducement under the same circumstances, whether we were guilty or innocent."

"And who," propounded the Inspector, "do you reckon that person to be?"

Geddes finished his parcel and set it aside.

"My theories," he declared evasively, "wouldn't stand your expert criticism, Mr. Brasher. Nor do I wish to improve my acquaintance with the law of libel."

Brasher wrinkled his brows.

"If you are thinking," he said, "of a certain rumour about a quarrel having taken place between Sir Christopher and—a—relation the day prior to the discovery of the late baronet's body I will admit it reached our ears. But the—the relative in question spent the night at Duchester; I have checked his movements myself. He simply could not have committed the murder."

Geddes glanced from behind the screen, his small, keen pupils expressing some surprise.

"Upon my word," he ejaculated, "you are a smarter hand than I believed you, Mr. Brasher. And are you quite sure there is no doubt of Mr. Felix Dering's——"

"S-s-sh!" muttered the Inspector; "no names—better not, much better not."

"Well, of the relation's innocence," said Geddes; "as you prefer the mysterious way of putting the case."

Inspector Brasher nodded.

"If it could be proved," he answered, "that, at any moment of a particular night, the relation was in Wyresdale, I would nab him without hesitation. But since he spent the whole of the evening in Duchester, at his hotel, or at the theatre, he is free, Mr. Geddes, and, as you observe, there is the libel law to consider."

Archibald Geddes whistled.

"You see, Inspector," he said, "I was right when I warned you my theories would not survive your analysis. However, I am charmed to know that the Wyresdale scandalmongers are wrong again, and that I am a failure as a crime investigator."

Brasher smiled loftily; he was pleased with the Scotchman's discomfiture. Before he could pursue the subject a quick step sounded at the back of the screen, and Connie Forester entered the shop by the private door.

A warm glow suffused Mr. Brasher's cheek, all his official dignity deserted him; he bowed with an embarrassed eagerness. Geddes flushed also, but he devoted himself to clearing away his apparatus.

"I—I dropped in," stammered the Inspector, "to convey the verdict to Mr. Geddes."

Judith ran down to the water and hurled out into the lake the package she had made of Brian's bedgown.

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

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Connie's pretty face lost its air of elaborate indifference.

"Yes," she said; "may I know, too?"

"They found it murder against poor Ted Spencer," explained Geddes scornfully, "and I think less of a Wyresdale jury than I ever did."

Constance Forester sighed.

"Esther—Miss Carew will be sorry," she murmured. "Barbara, the housemaid at the R says, was walking out with him, and Miss Carew is very fond of Barbara."

She gazed pleadingly at the Inspector.

"Don't you fancy, Mr. Brasher," she urged, "that there is a horrible mistake somewhere? Sir Christopher must have dismissed Ted a dozen times when he was a little excited, but Ted was always kept on, and Sir Christopher and he were the best of friends. Getting notice is supposed to be the only reason for his harming the squire, isn't it?"

Inspector Brasher conceded the point.

"True," he said, "but Spencer was seen near the place that night, and when he was accused he had a cock-and-bull story about having noticed a horse, led, with a figure like Sir Christopher on it. If he'd volunteered the evidence before his arrest it would have been singular enough, but to bring it out after he was in custody made it more incredible. And, to crown all, he must escape from our strong-room and remove the last doubt in the jury's mind."

"Oh," cried Connie, with a fine burst of contempt, "why shouldn't he get off when he knew he hadn't done it? You police have no hearts. Mr. Brasher, I'm certain if I were accused of murdering Sir Christopher, you would arrest me."

Brasher drew himself to his full height, very red and bashful.

"If I had such a warrant given me to execute, Miss Connie," he said, "I would go down to the Black Pool, tie a stone to my neck, and jump in."

Constance Forester was no coquette, but she could not help a throb of flattered feminine pride at the tremulous significance of the big voice. Archibald Geddes, behind his screen, had a sudden thrill, yet it was one of jealousy.

"You are growing quite gallant, Mr. Brasher," Connie rallied her admirer, "though I'm afraid your being in the Black Pool wouldn't help me. I'd rather, instead of drowning yourself, you found the real criminal, which wouldn't be me any more than it is Ted Spencer."

The Inspector twisted his moustache.

"If I can pitch upon somebody else, Miss Connie," he promised, "against whom there is a crushing piece of evidence, or if I can obtain a clue which seems to vindicate Spencer, I will be the first to inform you of it. I assure you I shall be sufficiently rewarded by that privilege. Good-day to you, Miss Forester. Good-day, Mr. Geddes."

And, with a tender glance at Connie and a stride that would have done credit to one of the Three Musketeers, he marched into the High Street.

As he walked down the sunny thoroughfare, in which groups of Wyresdale folk were still discussing the result of the coroner's inquiry and the disappearance of the accused, the Inspector beheld Caleb Forester returning, as his demeanour showed but too plainly, from the Wheatsheaf Hotel.

The short frame of the chemist, beneath its silver tresses, swayed to and fro like an inverted pendulum. His mouth was expanded into a foolish smile, his arms stiff and dangling. Near the Inspector he halted unsteadily.

"So it's you, Mist' Brasher," he stuttered. "How do you 'preciate the verdict, eh? It's a great load off my mind—a great load.'

"That I should guess," said the Inspector, scanning his neighbour's reeling form; "but don't you imagine you were better with the load on?"

Caleb Forester grasped himself by the lapels of a worn velvet coat.

"I told myself," he mumbled, the indistinctness gradually passing from his speech, though the limp quality of his limbs increased, "all will be well if he only lies low and says nothing. I will never betray him. He lent me money when my wife died and I nearly lost the shop. 'Let us hope n body but me saw him,' I said, 'but we must chance that. Crouch down and let the hounds go by.' And he did—he did!"

Inspector Brasher seized the old chemist's arm and guided him up High Street.

"Yours was excellent advice," he observed quietly, "and, as you remark, it has been justified by events. I trust he is grateful."

"Grateful!" repeated Caleb. "Why should Mr. Dering be grateful to me? I should have been driven out of house and home but for him. No, no, I gave him no advice, but I kept his secret—yes, I kept his secret."

"Mr. Dering!" gasped the Inspector under his breath. "Michael Brasher, go easy—this is the case of your life."

The acute ear of the drunkard caught the opening part of the whisper, and a belated caution flared up in his brain. He wrenched himself from the affectionate Brasher, vaguely conscious in his muddled state that he had committed an indiscretion.

"Excuse me," he quavered, "but I am in a hurry. My daughter will be waiting for me—a dear girl, yet her mother's child, and impatient, just a little impatient. Good afternoon, Mr. Brasher."

He tottered off, morosely polite. As he swerved into the entrance of his shop a spider-phaeton and a pair of roans whirled by, Otto Hare driving the swift cobs. The Golden Dwarf was yet a novel sight in the thoroughfares of Wyresdale, and many a head was turned to mark his tiny figure, handsome profile, and the diamond rings that glittered on his child-like fingers.

"They say," muttered the Inspector, gazing at the impassive owner of the phaeton, "that you are in love with Felix Dering's sweetheart. If it be true you would be glad to know what I know now. He will not block your path for long, not for long."

Then the stalwart form of Michael Brasher lounged thoughtfully onward in the glow of the setting sun.

CHAPTER XI.

A Door is Knocked at.

The July moon looked down at Wyresdale between the driving storm-clouds, which, from time to time, threw their giant shadows over the panorama. A deeper blot of gloom against the dim perspective of the night, Judith Garland hurried on, the little baronet slumbering in her arms.

Once the breeze flung open a fold of her cloak, and the sweet, childish face, with its veined eyelids and fair curls, became visible. Judith contemplated it for a moment, then covered it up again. There was something in her proud, relentless features that made her strange beauty almost diabolical.

Among the lawns and plantations of the home-park she glided, to emerge on the vast meadow that skirted, hereabouts, the Dering estate. The wind buffetted her angrily, yet she pressed forward, directing her course by the scattered clumps of tall elms that diversified the field.

Beyond the last of these the ground dipped, and she perceived, carried on the air, the sharp scent of water. She had neared the curious and miniature lake known to Wyresdale as the Black Pool.

Vague under the changeful sky, it spread a ruffled brown sheet, the waves lapping the flat lee-shore like some thirsty animal. Close to, a bluff hillock commanded the pool.

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

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Here Judith paused, put one hand to her mouth, and uttered a single low call. A man crept out of some sheltered niche in the irregular mound. His muddied vesture, his unshaven chin, his defiant bearing, served to indicate the personality of Neal Garland.

"You've been a deuce of a while," he growled; "I'd given you up, almost. Have you got the kid?"

His sister divided the heavy wrap which concealed her burden. The child still slept. Grunting approval, Neal Garland led them to a recess shielded from the wind, but lighted intermittently by the moonbeams.

"I secured the toggery this morning," he said. "Walked to Duchester on purpose and bought it at a slop-shop there. I didn't pawn your ring, they wouldn't lend enough, so I sold outright for a fiver; that will enable us to keep intact the precious bit of paper with Mr. Felix Dering's signature."

He chuckled as he knelt down, unwrapped a parcel, and produced a tiny woollen shirt, soiled, a patched jacket and knickers, a pair of stockings, a cap, and a brace of cobbled shoes.

"Will the youngster howl?" he asked, coarsely, taking the first of the articles in his fingers.

"Let me manage it," recommended Judith, and took the thing from him.

Hollowing her cloak, she slipped off her charge's loose bedgown and whipped the rough garment into its place. Brian Dering woke and wailed.

"Curse the brat!" muttered Neal, and he would have laid a brutal palm on the small lips.

But Judith Garland evaded the motion.

"Don't be a fool," she snapped, and turned to the sobbing child, "Brian," she said, "you must be a good boy and you shall go to mother in a moment. There has been a big fire and Dering House is all burned up. But mother is safe, and when you are dressed you will be taken to her."

The little baronet checked his grief.

"Was it a great, huge fire?" he asked, "oh, I do wish I had seen it. And were my own clothes spoiled; these are not mine, you know."

Judith was completing his toilet with quick, feminine skill.

"They are the best we could get, dear," she told him; "fancy if we had not been able to find any for you!"

"Where did they come from?" inquired the child, shivering in the night breeze.

"This gentleman has borrowed them for us," said Judith, pointing to Neal.

Brian peered at him through the shadows.

"Thank you," he observed; "it is quite dark, isn't it, so I can't tell who you are. But I am much obliged, really."

Neal grinned. "You would be, my lad," he assented; "if you understood how far I had to go for them."

The child did not hear this retort, his head had sunk upon Judith Garland's shoulder and he slept again. Judith was rolling the bedgown, which Brian had worn, in the sheet that had contained the apparel fetched by Neal. She had enclosed with the packet a large stone and tied the bundle firmly.

"Hold out your arms," she whispered to her brother, and straightened herself from her crouching position. Neal obeyed; she yielded the boy to him. "Walk into Derby," was her advice; "don't risk Duchester. At Derby take the express to London. Where shall I write?"

"Hattaras Street, Pimlico," he instructed; "care of Mrs. Schwartz, but don't trust ink with anything dangerous."

"Am I the sort?" queried his sister, "and, by-the-bye, you had better leave that cheque with me, hadn't you?"

"What's the matter with my having it?" objected Neal.

Judith sneered.

"You'd pass it the instant you struck a nasty corner," she said, "and deprive us of our best card. Felix Dering is powerless if we, who alone can explain the disappearance of this baby, possess a cheque for twenty pounds to bearer, signed by him. That cheque is worth more uncashed than cashed—it was paid to you, we will suggest, as the price of kidnapping Brian Dering, the child to whom Felix is heir. So he dare not repudiate the fortune we will procure him—for our private ends!"

"By Jove, Judith," ejaculated Neal Garland, settling the unconscious boy on his dingy bosom, "you are a perfect marvel! I had some idea of using the cheque as a lever, but my notion was hazy in the extreme. Yours is all cut and dried."

He dived into a cavity of his costume and fished up a document—a document showing at its edge the unmistakable traces of a counterfoil. Judith examined it—it was the cheque she had obtained from Felix, with a few artistic equivocations, a few mock tears.

Consigning it to her pocket, she ran down to the water and hurled out over the lake the package she had formed of Brian's bedgown and a suitable boulder. Then she stole up the bank; the wind had subsided abruptly and the massed clouds veiled the moon.

"Ta-ta," she said; "your share of the work will be finished by to-morrow. You shall hear how I progress with mine."

Neal nodded and would have moved off, but she detained him by a gesture, and, snatching the shawl from her neck, wrapped it about the slumbering boy.

"He will sleep sounder if he is warm," she murmured drily, as though to explain her action; "*au revoir*, my dear Neal."

She waved a hasty farewell and vanished in the gloom. Neal Garland balanced his burden and set out athwart the meadow.

Gaining the high-road, he adopted a characteristic stride that devoured the miles with singular speed. When the dawn began to suffuse the East he was still on the march, a lean, tireless figure. The sun sprang clear of the horizon, the odours and noises of the day grew to right and left, the wind rose again. But Neal Garland pushed forward, carrying the drowsy child.

Once he halted at a grassy knoll, and, gathering some mould, smeared the little baronet's hands and face—their delicacy was too conspicuous in the fresh light.

His sleep over, Brian Dering awakened; Neal felt him stir

"It's morning," said the child, endeavouring to sit up; "I want mother."

"Lie quiet," ordered Neal; "we are not come to mother yet—we have a long way to go. Be a good lad."

"I am so hungry!" sighed Brian, pushing a brown fist free of the shawl.

"You shall have a cake soon," growled his custodian, and added to himself, "Curse it, how am I to feed the brat!"

Neal's pace quickened—the spire and chimneys of a hamlet loomed in front. He stepped aside and deposited Sir Brian under a hedge.

"Stay where you are," he said; "I am going for your breakfast."

"I don't like my breakfast out here," demurred the child.

Neal frowned.

"If you are not sensible you shan't have any," he intimated. Brian did not venture upon a reply—famine is a stern tutor.

Neal Garland hastened onward, purchased bread and biscuits at a village dealers, and revisited his charge. The boy ate the biscuits, though with a certain nervousness; Neal devoured the bread in silence.

"Shall we get to mother soon?" Brian paused to ask. "I do want to go home to mother."

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

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"Oh shut up about your mother," snarled the elder; "you've got your breakfast; what more do you wish for."

"I love my mother," announced Brian; "and, please, I should like something to drink. Waters always used to bring me my milk when I woke."

"You can't have one just now," said Neal; "I'll buy you some milk at the railway station."

The child caught at the remark. "Are we going in a train?" he queried.

"We are," assented Neal Garland, irritably, and crumpling the biscuits and their tissue bag together, he bade Brian grasp them, and lifted the boy into his arms. The little baronet dosed, despite the awkwardness of the cradle.

Shortly before noon, after a second halt to consume a further portion of the biscuits, Neal stalked into the Midland depot at Derby. He procured a glass of milk from the refreshment room and brought it to his charge. Brian drank it thirstily. Satisfied, he glanced up to say, with a slow, soft, smile, "Thank you." Neal Garland shrank away, went to the buffet, ordered sixpenny-worth of brandy and swallowed it, neat!

The express arriving, he bore the child into an empty compartment. Hardly had the train started than he thrust Brian from him, urging the boy to look out of a window.

During the journey Neal spoke but seldom and Brian Dering slept much—not in his custodian's arms, but on the seat of the carriage. At St. Pancras Neal resumed his burden, and hailing a hansom, had himself driven to Victoria. There he descended, reckoned with the cabman, and plunged into Pimlico.

Near the middle of a decayed and slatternly thoroughfare he mounted a flight of crumbling steps and knocked at the door.

CHAPTER XII.

"PEOPLE ARE SAYING A HORRIBLE THING."

"Is she not beautiful, Kraft? Can even your cold scientific intellect deny her worth the winning?"

The Golden Dwarf checked his mare—a spirited, finely-limbed Arab—and contemplated the picture to which he had called his companion's attention. A faint smile illuminated the pale orbs behind Joseph Kraft's gold-rimmed glasses as he regarded—from the saddle of a tall, weight-carrying bay—the sweet, unconscious figure of Esther Carew.

"You are scarcely the most unbiassed of critics, my dear friend," he said, "but you are right, nevertheless. That turn of the head, those blonde locks like spun sunshine, the delicate proportions, so just, so elastic, the piquant foot and ankle! Otto, she is, indeed, a type of loveliness too ethereal to deserve the term British."

Otto Hare frowned.

"You describe her," he retorted jealously, "as if you might be an artist instead of a sawbones."

The German did not answer; he was watching Esther Carew. She had paused in her walk by a low hawthorn hedge which bordered the small plot of ground about a tumble-down cottage on the way-side. From the garden a man pruned the thorn-bushes by means of a bill-hook. His one arm enabled Joseph Kraft to identify him—he was Nicholas Foley.

A moment more and the sailor had noticed Esther's presence. He stopped his work and pulled at a greasy forelock. Kraft strained his ears to catch across the green bend of the lane some scrap of their conversation.

"Arternoon, miss," Nicholas observed; "I'll lay you don't mind me, do you now?"

The girl made a shy motion of dissent.

"I wondered who could have rented the cottage," she faltered; "it has been empty since——"

"Since my old mother, rest her soul," cried the sailor, "died here five years agone. Don't you remember Nick Foley as used to cut faces on cherrystones for you, Miss Esther, Nick Foley as sailed ships for Connie Forester and you on the Black Pool, Nick Foley as was Connie's uncle. You've growed, miss, but I knew you by your curls and your eyes."

Esther grasped the brown hand extended to her.

"I—I am sorry you've had an accident," she said, glancing at the loose sleeve of the other's jacket.

Nicholas grinned. "A lost flipper don't amount to much," he assured her, "and I've had enough of the sea."

He hesitated, staring over her shoulder as if fascinated. Esther followed his glance, and perceived, at the curve of the leafy bypath, the two riders—Otto Hare and the German.

They lifted their hats, and the Golden Dwarf, with a full, vindictive look towards the sailor, raised himself in his stirrups and spoke to Kraft.

Nicholas Foley ducked behind the hedge. "Excuse me, miss," he said, "but I shouldn't wish the little beggar on the slim nag to spot me, though it's the Bank of England to a Mexican dollar he's done it already Is he on your visiting-list, miss? I saw as how they dipped their ensigns to you."

"I know Mr. Hare slightly," admitted Esther, colouring, "it is Dr. Kraft who is with him."

The sailor popped up from the rear of the thorn-bushes. "'Ware Dutchy!" he whispered, "he's a wrong un, a dead wrong un. Prick him down on your chart, Miss Esther, shoal water, foul anchorage, cannibals. Luff and keep away."

And emphasising these hints by many distortions of his tanned visage, Nicholas Foley dodged athwart the garden plot, and vanished into his cottage. He was not a second too soon, Otto Hare had ridden forward, abandoning the German, who wheeled his bay and cantered back along the lane.

The swift Arab that bore the Golden Dwarf brought him into Esther's neighbourhood at a gallop. Otto Hare dragged the slender creature on its haunches and leapt off.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Carew," she was told. The strange being at her side, a child in stature, a man in symmetry and feature, flung the reins over an arm and bowed. "I trust you are well," he added.

"Oh yes," answered Esther, experiencing the nervous tremor that invariably shook her at the advent of the Golden Dwarf.

"I think," pursued Otto Hare, "that you can do me a service, Miss Carew; the fellow to whom you were speaking an instant ago. May I ask his name—some ragamuffin parishioner, I suppose."

Esther trembled—so grim a scowl had darkened the Golden Dwarf's countenance. She remembered Nicholas Foley's trepidation.

"I am afraid you don't wish to do him any particular kindness, Mr. Hare," she ventured bravely.

Otto Hare tapped his switch against his riding-boots. "You have a gentle heart, Miss Carew," he said: "this blackguard, trespassing in my park, stabbed a favourite mastiff. It died. If I loved the brute for nothing else, I valued it for bringing me the priceless boon of your acquaintance."

"That dog!" gasped Esther, and recoiled. The Golden Dwarf changed colour.

"You did not appreciate poor Cerberus's good qualities," he declared drily. 'Perhaps you would be glad if I pardoned his slayer?"

"I should, indeed," cried the girl.

Nicholas Foley had once been a rare miracle worker to her and her playmate Connie Forester.

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

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The Golden Dwarf dragged the slender creature on its haunches.

Otto Hare snapped his fingers.

"He is forgiven from this minute," she was informed.

Esther blushed. The situa ion had betrayed her into begging a favour from the Golden Dwarf.

To disguise her embarrassment she patted his mare.

"How very graceful your horse is," said Esther, "I did not think a horse's limbs could be so slender."

"A pure Arab is not a common piece of property," observed the Golden Dwarf. "Mine is as swift as she is gentle, as loyal as she is swift. Permit me to consecrate her to a fitting mistress—Miss Carew, I shall esteem myself honoured if you will accept the mare for your own."

Esther Carew started. "You overwhelm me, Mr. Hare," she stammered; "but really—"

Otto Hare bit his lip.

"No one," he said, "will ever possess anything after I have offered it to you and you have refused it. The filigree bracelet you would not have, I broke—this evening the mare dies."

Esther Carew quailed at the suppressed passion of the miniature man before her. A dangerous anger blazed in his small face and his nostrils twitched ominously.

"Please," begged Esther; "you couldn't be so cruel, Mr. Hare; you are just trying to alarm me."

Otto Hare considered her quietly, his cheeks were white and his mouth drawn. "The mare dies!" was all he would say.

"She shan't!" stormed Esther, at last, waxing desperate, "for I will have her. And I shall hate you, Mr. Hare, all my life."

The Golden Dwarf paid scant heed to the threat.

"That must be as it will," he vouchsafed, "Miss Carew, with your leave I shall ride the mare home. She shall reach the Rosery this afternoon."

He stepped closer and the unnatural pallor of his complexion was exchanged for a scarlet tinge.

"Miss Carew," he said, "hitherto, you have underestimated Otto Hare, an excusable error, in view of his physical deficiencies. Learn, henceforth, to regard me more justly. I have a presentiment that—for good or for evil—our fates are linked."

His words struck Esther numb—they had the ring of stern and unmistakable conviction. While she shuddered—averting her head, lest she should be fixed by his masterful gaze—the Golden Dwarf leapt to the saddle and spurred off at a gallop. Esther walked on, feeling as though she had dreamed it all.

The direction she had chosen led her past the gates of the avenue that debouched from Dering House. Here she was drawn out of her semi-stupefaction by a welcome encounter. She met Felix Dering.

He was pacing towards the High Street—pacing with an abstracted gait and a despondent mien. Esther hastened to overtake him; when, at her call, he halted and turned, she was shocked to see how ill he appeared.

(To be continued next Tuesday.)

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

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"THE CAPTAIN'S ROMANCE."

THE "tramp" *Caledonia* was a type of steamer now, happily, fast becoming extinct. Lloyds and the Board of Trade are so lynx-eyed in these latter days, so watchful of the interests of sea-going people, that it is practically impossible for such ill-built, ill-found craft as the *Caledonia* to navigate the high seas with impunity.

In this particular instance vessel and commander may safely be said to have been fairly on a par.

A good seaman, as average foremast hands go, presumably too, a man to be relied upon where brute courage, and dogged endurance were required, John McTaggart as a navigator had but little reputation, that little, indeed, being of a decidedly doubtful character.

Two ships in his time had he lost, on each occasion having had his certificate suspended; an official intimation of absolute cancelment being given should "misfortune" befall him a third time.

But this troubled honest John not a whit, for there are owners in plenty only too ready to employ masters with a damaged certificate at a small wage; the very fact of the skipper's shadiness giving them a possible opportunity of using him to advantage, so that, given an unscrupulous and greedy owner, John might always be sure of a ship—of a certain sort.

So much for the Captain; it being merely added that he was a hard-headed Scotchman of early middle age; keen on the dollars, and alert at all times and seasons, and in all places to make things work together for his own benefit first, and then, if there was anything left worth having, for the good of his employers.

The *Caledonia* was a worn out, patched-up specimen of its class, hailing from Dundee; its crew being made up of contributions from well-nigh every nationality under the sun. With the exception of the mate and the engineer, and, of course, the skipper, there was not an English-speaking tongue on board. As with every community of "all sorts and conditions," there was good and bad, the latter decidedly predominating.

One Ah-Lu, a villainous-looking Chinaman from Singapore, and an insidious breeder of mischief, was an easy first in an estimate of forecastle wickedness. More than once had he been caught by Harris, the mate, in some flagrant act contrary to rule, discipline, and even the elementary principles of common honesty. But Ah-Lu was a true Celestial, and took everything, warning and threat alike with imperturbable good-humour. That he did not forget will be seen later on, when opportunity came for a full revenge without let or hindrance.

The *Caledonia*, according to the nautical habit of "tramps" in general, pursued her wandering, vagabond course from month to month, and from year to year.

At the time of this writing she was cruising, apparently idly, but with her eyes very wide open, in that Pacific region which borders closely upon the famous Barrier Reef and New Guinea.

That she was on the look out for a paying cargo was evident, she being light in ballast, and with an unpleasantly suggestive wealth of freeboard.

Chief Officer Harris had vainly tried to worm the ship's destination out of the "old man," but with proverbial caution the canny Scot declined to bite.

In the neighbourhood of New Guinea, there are islands innumerable; some absolutely unknown to the ordinary navigator. It is from the natives of these islands that a large percentage of the so-called "hired labour" for the Australian continent is recruited. That it is a thinly veiled system of slavery goes without saying, and is hardly denied. Harris knew all this well, and was shrewdly suspicious as to the description of cargo contemplated by Skipper McTaggart. Undue scrupulousness was not the mate's strong point, but on this subject he had opinions; opinions that were not shared by his superior officer.

It had always been a matter of surprise to him that Ah-Lu the Chinaman and Captain McTaggart were, to say the least, on better terms, than would be ordinarily warranted by their respective positions; but when, as quite recently, he had seen them in earnest confab during his own watch below, and when he was supposed to be out of harm's way, he began to think thoughts, not altogether favourable to Captain McTaggart's personal straightforwardness, and immaculate respectability.

About the third day after this incident, and when they were threading their way through an archepelago of small islets, each beautiful, each romantic enough for place in fairy story, the skipper so far communicated his plan to the mate, as to assure that officer that his suspicions as to legalised kidnapping were unfounded.

"Alter the course three points to the Westward," he said at the close of the second dog watch. "If you make land before 'eight bells,' rouse me and muster all hands. I'm going to turn in now."

The Captain's cabin was a deck house, just abaft the bridge and Harris could easily see from over the weather-cloth right into the place, as long as its occupant kept a light burning.

Shortly after two bells, he saw Ah-Lu, who belonged to the "starboard," or second mate's watch, creep round from the waist, and quietly opening the door of the Captain's room, slip silently inside. It may be interesting to describe in brief what took place.

"All right!" said McTaggart in a low voice, "stand over by the door," he himself was lying in his bunk; "Now, you're sure about this woman: that she has the gold and other things you say; and that it will be an easy matter to get her on board, and afterwards bring off the treasure?

"You're sure, eh? For if you're making a fool of me I'll wring your yellow neck as I would a rat's."

"Allee same good, allee same light," replied Ah-Lu, "me makee showee you; you givee me plenty dolla; allee same velly much glad."

"Well I hope so," said the skipper again, "for if not, you know what's in store for you. You've got everything ready for'ad as we agreed?"

"Eblyting."

"Good! then go below again, and keep awake till you hear that land's made, and then come aft to me, sabe?"

"Me sabe," and the Chinaman disappeared as silently as he had come.

The mate could not well notice this contravention of discipline, the wandering about the deck during watch below, seeing that the Captain himself was implicated,

"The Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

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but he had seen enough to tell him that something unusually underhanded was afoot, and that he would probably be called upon before long to declare for or against Ceasar.

At seven bells the look-out forward announced "land" in sight, and, agreeably with his instructions, Harris roused McTaggart who, in less than five minutes, was on the bridge beside him.

In less than half-an-hour the *Caledonia* steamed at half-speed through a narrow inlet, wooded on either hand down to the water's edge, into a land-locked little harbour, and immediately dropped anchor.

The mate watched with astonishment the Chinaman, Ah-Lu, with three Malays, go, as by preconcerted arrangement, to the starboard quarter boat, and casting loose its lashings, rapidly lower it. Into it they descended and rowed away quickly for the shore.

They had scarcely made half the passage, when Harris hurriedly addressed McTaggart.

"There's a boat putting off, sir. I can't see very clearly, but it seems to me that there's only one person in it."

The Captain appeared a bit disconcerted, but said nothing, although evidently irresolute in the face of an unexpected difficulty.

The shore-going boat held on its way, only stopping a moment that Ah-Lu might see if there was any signal of recall from the *Caledonia's* bridge.

Meanwhile, the long, narrow canoe, impelled by sweeping steady strokes of the paddle, drew near the ship.

In anticipation of a visitor the mate cast over the side a rope ladder, the captain looking on and still saying nothing.

A grating noise along the vessel's side, and before either of the two men could prepare themselves for whatever might eventuate, a girl, tall, dark, lissom as a panther, and clothed in nothing save a brown cotton robe, wound round her in oriental fashion, and leaving her arms free, lightly ascended the side. Her hair, very plentiful, was worn in a large knot at the back of her shapely head. Both Harris and McTaggart stood for a moment puzzled beyond expression.

She did not look to be exactly native to the locality. There was something about her features and general appearance that suggested Western birth and blood. But then that idea was absurd! It couldn't be! This notion might have strengthened had not the first salutation of the fair visitor dissipated it once and for ever.

"What ship's this?" she said, in the purest "north of the Tweed" vernacular, which the reader is spared out of sheer merciful consideration for him or her.

"I beg pardon!" stammered McTaggart, "do they raise Scotch lassies in these parts?"

"Sometimes," she laughed, showing a set of white teeth that a society beauty might envy. "What is your boat gone ashore for?" she continued, with a contraction of her brows.

"Just to see after water and fresh provisions," replied the other, a trifle unhesitatingly.

"What? In the night? I'm afraid I must beg leave to question the wisdom if nothing else of that explanation, Captain——"

"McTaggart, ma'am."

"Captain McTaggart; and to set your mind at ease with regard to your men's safety, and so on. I would say that by this time they have been received, and well looked after by my servants."

"Oh!" that was all McTaggart could say.

"Should you really desire the things you mention," said the lady. "perhaps you will be good enough to send your chief officer (this gentleman, I presume, indicating Harris graciously) on shore at daylight."

"At once ma'am, at once," replied McTaggart hastily, over whom a curious feeling of admiration for his visitor was creeping almost unconsciously.

"As you please," she replied.

"Mr Harris, you hear! take Chips and bring back what's necessary. Steward!" a white clad Malay appeared at the call. "Make tea and set it in the saloon."

The lady did not seem in the least afraid at the prospect of a *tête à tête* with Captain McTaggart, but appeared highly amused.

During the meal, she told him that many years before, her father, Captain Hector Johnstone had been taken ill while anchored in this spot. That she, who always sailed with him, had accompanied him on shore, nursed him for a month; and when, at the end of that time he died, she, (the ship, the *Rothsay Castle* of Glasgow, having sailed under the command of the mate) was left alone with the natives who had been more than kind to her, and with whom she had remained ever since. Into further particulars or details she did not enter, although her companion was eager to know everything to the fullest extent.

His attempt to ingratiate himself with Miss Johnstone met with little encouragement, for once in his life, at any rate, he had met with his match. She read him like a book, the more extraordinary, seeing the lonely life she had led for so long, and the small opportunity she had had for the study of nature, human and otherwise.

Anyway McTaggart's love making was a miserable failure, and when, in the course of a couple of hours, Harris returned with a tale, not altogether unexpected by one of his listeners, of attempted robbery and murder, he felt that the romance he had chalked out for himself had vanished as completely as his own good name in British seafaring circles.

It seems that on landing Harris had found that Ah-Lu and his satellites had overpowered their guard, who had had them in custody since arrival, and that but for his intervention and prompt use of a certain weapon of precision, the conspirators would have been enabled to work their will.

"I had turned," said the mate, "after disposing of the three Malays, to settle matters with that Chinese devil, when he anticipated me by nearly burying his knife in my back. It's a nasty smack, but might have been worse; so I'll be content and thankful. Captain McTaggart, you'll have to take four names off your ship's books, for Ah-Lu has gone to join his three mates in the 'happy hunting grounds,' and needs but an undertaker now to make things all square and comfortable."

* * * * *

With the morning light the *Caledonia* up-anchored and got under weigh, leaving behind her Chief Officer Harris, whose wound promised a good two month's cessation from active life.

The fairy princess, Helen Johnstone, was a more than efficient nurse, and should you be in that part of the world, and seek hospitality at the hands of Mrs. Harris, *née* Johnstone, you will find as devoted a couple and as happy a home as is to be found in the whole wide world.

RALPH ENDERBY.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

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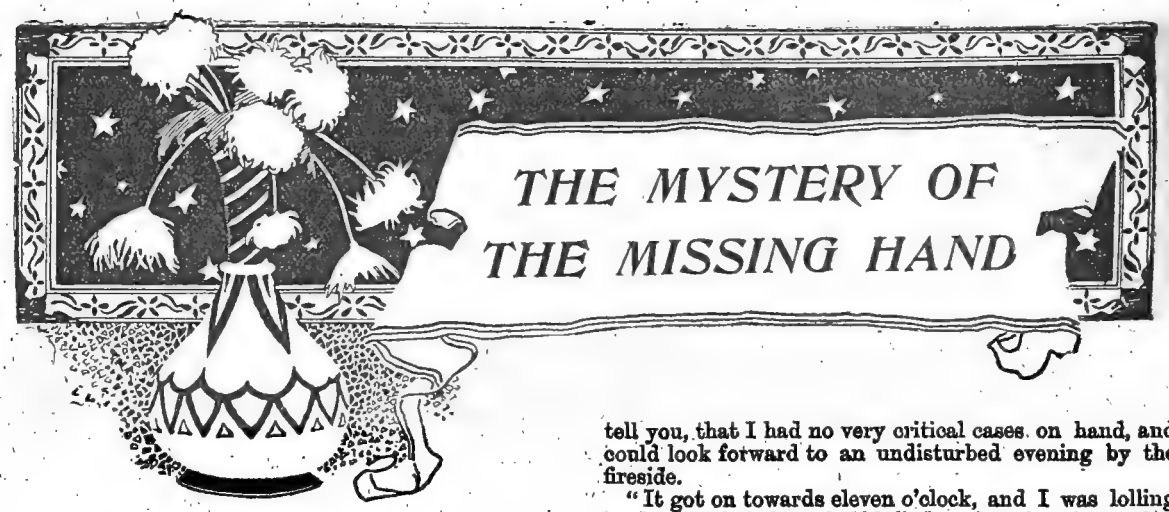

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING HAND

MAXWELL TRAVERS, a young surgeon from Guy's Hospital, whom I happened to know very well, was acting as *locum tenens* for a Dr. Hayward in some out-of-the-way corner of Norfolk; and, feeling rather cut off from the world I suppose, asked me to run down and spend a few days with him.

As I had nothing particular on hand at the moment, I packed up my traps at once and started for Norfolk. I did not anticipate anything in the way of excitement or adventure; indeed, I was inclined to imagine that I would find the life down there as humdrum and monotonous as it usually is in one of these sleepy little country towns.

But I was mistaken. On the first evening of my arrival a very tragic and sensational affair was brought under my notice, which presented all the elements of a deep and baffling mystery.

Travers, I discovered, was buried away in a little place called Frinton, a good five or six miles from the nearest railway station.

It was situated on the shores of the Wash, just where the south-west corner of it eats into the land between Norfolk and Lincoln.

We were seated before the fire after dinner, the pair of us, making ourselves comfortable over whiskey and cigars, when Travers suddenly looked up as if he had some interesting communication to make.

"By the way," he said, "I had rather a curious adventure last night, which you might like to hear about."

"What was that?" I asked, pricking up my ears at once.

"A very singular and mysterious affair, indeed," he returned, with a puzzled expression upon his face. "I can't for the life of me imagine what was at the bottom of it."

"Out with it, then," I urged. "Let's hear all about it."

"Well," he said, turning to me, "I don't know what sort of weather you had in town last night, but here it was raining cats and dogs, and blowing half a gale at the very least. The Wash was roaring and tumbling about in a boisterous manner, and the rain drove hard against the windows. I was thankful enough, I can tell you, that I had no very critical cases on hand, and could look forward to an undisturbed evening by the fireside.

"It got on towards eleven o'clock, and I was lolling in the armchair here, half-lulled to sleep by the raging of the storm outside, when a thundering knock at the hall door made me jump as if a pistol had been discharged close to my ear.

"I shuffled out into the hall in my slippers, wondering if some accident had occurred, or what could be the meaning of this hasty and imperative summons.

"The moment I opened the door my eyes fell upon the tall, dark figure of a man, standing there in the darkness and wet. He was so muffled up that I could scarcely distinguish his features; but yet there was a certain nameless air about him, that told me I had no ordinary person to deal with.

"Before I could open my lips, he hurriedly inquired if I was the young surgeon who had come down to take Dr. Hayward's duty. I assured him that I was, and asked what I could do for him.

"In a quick, abrupt, and somewhat agitated manner, he jerked out that a friend of his had met with a serious accident, and urged me to accompany him without an instant's delay. I verily believe he would have dragged me off just as I was, so great was his impatience.

"I tried to get in a question regarding the injury, but he cut me short by saying that there was not a moment to be lost. I gathered from him, however, that it was something in the nature of a severe wound, which had occasioned considerable hemorrhage, so much so, indeed, that the patient's life was in imminent danger. With this scanty information I had to be content.

"I begged him to step inside until I was ready, but he preferred to remain where he was. When I joined him again in a minute or two, he strode off at once through the darkness, and I had to step out pretty briskly in order to keep pace with him.

"We had not gone far when, greatly to my surprise, my companion turned aside abruptly and made straight for the beach. I stumbled along, half-blinded by the rain, and wondering where on earth the stranger was leading me to. As we neared the water's edge I made out the outline of a boat, hauled up on the strand, with two dark figures in oilskins standing beside it. Towards this spot we directed our steps.

"Before I had time to put a question the stranger hurried me on board, and took his place beside me in the stern. The next second the men shoved off; the

Stage Life Revelations. See page 96.

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boat was headed in an oblique line across the corner of the Wash, and we made for a point on the Lincoln shore with all possible speed.

"On the way across my unknown friend never opened his lips. Once or twice I thought of questioning him, but a glance at his dark, silent, brooding figure chilled me and threw me back upon myself.

"I was not sorry when we got to land, for it was not at all the sort of night one would choose for an excursion on the water. As I jumped out on to the strand and looked around me, I caught the glimmer of a lantern twinkling through the wet on the road above us. A trap was waiting there under the dripping trees. I was bundled into it with scant ceremony; the tall stranger swung himself up beside, seized the reins, and off we drove.

"The blackness of the night and the driving rain prevented me from noting what direction we took, especially as the trap was without lamps. I am inclined to think, however, that we did not proceed far inland, for I could hear the roar of the Wash distinctly the whole time.

"In about half-an-hour we swung round into a bye-road, through a regular tunnel of trees, where it was so dark that you couldn't see your hand before you, and finally came to what looked like a huge iron gateway. The groom sprang down from behind, threw open the gates, and we dashed up a fairly long avenue. The next minute we alighted before a large, solid-looking country mansion.

"I had not the faintest idea where I was, or what was the name of this house. Nor was I given much time to look around me.

"The stranger hurried me through the hall, and led the way to a great, gloomy dining-room, furnished in the cumbersome, old-fashioned style.

"At one end of the room I noticed a sort of alcove across which heavy curtains were stretched, and tightly drawn together.

"My companion placed a chair before this screened opening, settled a soft cushion upon it, brought the lamp across, and stood it on a small table close at hand.

"'Will you be good enough to remain just here?' he said, indicating the chair, when he had completed his preparations.

"Without another word, without the slightest attempt at an explanation, he hurried away and left me to my own thoughts.

"Up to this moment I had been given little time for reflection, for it was more or less of a rush from start to finish.

"But now, as I stood there alone in the silence of this great, dimly-lighted room, one or two very singular circumstances forced themselves upon my attention.

"In the first place, why had I been brought here from such a distance? Surely, in a case which appeared to be so urgent, these people could have obtained the services of a medical man nearer home. But instead of that, they had gone to the trouble of fetching me all the way from the other side of the Wash.

"I was turning this over in my mind, and seeking in vain for a satisfactory explanation, when my attention was attracted by a sound in the adjoining room. At first there was a confused shuffling of feet, a murmur of voices, amongst which I detected the deep tones of my late companion, and then a long-drawn, shuddering moan. After that it seemed as if a couch or something was wheeled into the alcove, and I could hear the laboured, painful breathing of the patient within a few feet of me.

"As I stood there, wondering what would come next, I noticed a slight movement in the centre of the curtains. The next moment they were drawn aside an inch or two; a long, slender arm was protruded through the opening, and laid gently upon the cushioned chair. The lower extremity of the arm was swathed in blood-stained bandages; but there was something about the shape, from the wrist downwards, which struck me as being remarkably odd.

"It was in a very perplexed and disturbed state of mind that I set about removing the bandages; and then—good Heavens!—I got such a shock that I almost collapsed on the spot. The hand was gone! It had been severed from the wrist by a clean, sweeping cut, and there was nothing before me but the jagged, unsightly-looking stump.

"Upon making this startling discovery, it was some little time before I could brace myself to proceed with my duties. I found that the wound had been attended to with considerable surgical skill, otherwise the patient would undoubtedly have bled to death.

"It took me a good long time to tie the severed arteries and do all that was necessary. Beyond a low moan or a stifled gasp occasionally, the patient—I could not tell from the appearance of the arm whether it was a man or a woman—never uttered a sound throughout the whole operation.

"When I had replaced the bandages again, the arm was withdrawn behind the curtain, and I turned to find the tall stranger standing silently behind me.

"I saw by the look on his face that it would be perfectly useless to address a single question to him, and so contented myself with giving a few general directions. He thanked me very courteously, expressed his regret at having been compelled to call me out on such a night; and, more to the purpose, laid five guineas upon the table.

"He said nothing, however, about me repeating my visit, but conducted me to the door and there took leave of me.

"I was driven back to the spot where we had landed, stepped into the boat again, and reached home about two o'clock in the morning, drenched to the skin, and pretty well done up into the bargain.

"That was my adventure," he added, after a pause. "And I think you will admit it was a singular one."

Without a doubt it was; one of the most singular which had come under my notice for a long time. I felt convinced that there was something very queer at the bottom it all.

One fact, the significance of which had probably escaped Travers, struck me forcibly. It was clear to me that the stranger's object in fetching a medical man from such a distance was to avoid giving rise to talk in the immediate neighbourhood. Taken in conjunction with all the other circumstances, it showed that these people, whoever they were, had something to conceal. What it was exactly, I would have given a good deal to find out.

"Did you form any opinion as to how the accident occurred?" I asked. "That is, if it really was an accident."

"No," replied Travers. "I can't say that I did."

You've spoken to your friends about "The Golden Dwarf," of course?

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"And you saw nothing of the person behind the curtains?"

"Nothing, except the arm."

"Which arm was it?"

"The right."

I was silent for some little time, pondering deeply over this extraordinary and inexplicable affair. Then I looked up at Travers again.

"I suppose you have a general idea as to the situation of that house?" I said.

He saw what was in my mind, and refused to be drawn.

"It won't do, old boy," he said, shaking his head. "You mustn't go prying into these people's secret. It would be distinctly dangerous. I can assure you, from what I saw of him, my friend of last night was not at all the kind of man to be trifled with."

Nevertheless, in the course of the next day or two, I managed to pump him very effectually by displaying a well-feigned interest in the topography of the country adjoining the Wash. When I considered that I had enough information to go upon, I slipped away quietly one afternoon while he was out of the way, leaving word that I might not be back until late that night.

I hired a small boat and pulled across to the point where I reckoned Travers and the stranger must have landed.

On reaching it I dragged the boat well above high water mark, hid the oars among some bushes, and took to the road.

It was a long and weary hunt, and more than once I felt half inclined to abandon the thing altogether. But at last, by dint of much questioning at wayside cottages, I reached the tunnel of trees described by Travers, and a minute or two later stood before the massive iron gates that gave access to the grounds.

It was quite dark by this time, which suited my purpose admirably, for I had no wish to be seen prowling about the place.

The gates were locked, but I managed to clamber over the wall a little lower down and approached the house in a very wary and circumspect manner.

It seemed, at first sight, to be almost deserted, so silent and gloomy did it appear. There was scarcely a light to be seen anywhere.

As I stood behind a tree a little way off, and gazed up at the darkened building, I could not help wondering what secret was hidden behind those four walls.

Gradually, by slipping along from tree to tree, I worked my way round to the back. Here there was a long, narrow strip of sward, something like a bowling alley, bordered on either side by a thick hedge and tall elm trees. At the further extremity, about fifty yards from the house, was an ivied ruin, which must have been the former residence of the family.

I was peeping over the hedge, and looking cautiously around, when I saw a dark figure gliding along at the opposite side of the alley. The man, whoever he was, made straight for the ruin, stood for a moment or two under the ivy-clad wall; and then—vanished! He disappeared as suddenly and completely as if the ground had opened and swallowed him up!

This was getting interesting. I felt I was upon the track of the mystery now, and that if it could be brought to light it would prove something of a very startling nature.

I was debating as to my next move, and wholly absorbed in watching the ruins meanwhile, when I was considerably startled by hearing a footstep close behind me. The next second a cautious voice whispered in my ear:

"Seen anything?"

I whisked round at once; and, to my utter amazement, found myself face to face with a police-inspector.

I really think that, for the first second or so, he was almost as much taken aback as I was myself. He had evidently men on the watch, and had mistaken me for one of them.

But he quickly recovered from his surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in gruff and suspicious tones.

The situation was decidedly an awkward one, to say the least of it, and I thought it better to be perfectly candid with him. I told him my story in a plain, straightforward manner, winding up by relating the curious incident I had just witnessed. That appeared to impress him rather in my favour, but still he displayed an unmistakable desire to keep me under his wing until he had more convincing proof as to the honesty of my intentions.

"We'll sift this yarn of yours later on," he said, in a non-committal sort of way. "Meanwhile, you had better stick close to me; and let me warn you that if you try to give me the slip you will get yourself into trouble."

He moved back a little, got behind a tree, and flashed his lantern cautiously. In less than a minute we were joined by about six or eight constables in plain clothes, who looked at me very curiously as they came up.

A whispered conference followed; and then the inspector moved away towards the ruins, motioning me to follow. At his request I pointed out the spot where I had seen the man disappear, but at first we could not discover an opening of any sort.

I was groping about amongst the ivy when my hand suddenly encountered an iron knob. I drew the inspector's attention to it at once. Upon investigation it proved to be the handle of a small door, which was completely hidden by the thick tangle of ivy that hung loosely down in front.

The inspector got the door open, lifted the matting of creeper, and stepped inside. I followed closely at his heels. Three of the constables accompanied us; the rest were left on guard outside the ruins.

We groped our way along a musty passage until we were brought up by a second door. Passing through this we descended a flight of stone steps, where we had to tread with the utmost caution, and found ourselves in a dark underground cellar, as damp and chilly as a vault.

We moved across to a door in the opposite wall, which gave access to an adjoining cellar; upon entering which we saw at once that our quest had well-nigh come to an end, and that we were close upon a discovery.

Straight opposite us was another door, the upper portion of which had been perforated with a number of round holes, as if to admit the air. A strong light streamed from all of them,

The inspector tiptoed across, and soon had his eye glued to one of the holes. I followed his example. As I gazed through that tiny aperture the sight I beheld was so astonishing, so extraordinary, that it was with difficulty I repressed a gasp of amazement.

The "Adventures of an Actress" are coming. See Editor's Page.

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Before me was a long, underground chamber, lighted by lamps suspended from the ceiling and shaded so as to throw the glare downwards. Along each of the side walls ran something that looked like a workman's bench, upon which were ranged a number of tools, copper plates, and jars which seemed to contain chemicals.

A rough deal table occupied the centre, and upon it stood a couple of curious-looking machines, some smooth, polished stones, and other remarkable paraphernalia, of which I could not even guess the use.

If you add to all this the fact that four or five men were busily at work there in their shirt-sleeves some at the benches, some at the table, you will scarcely wonder that I was both bewildered and mystified. I could think of no other explanation than that we had stumbled across a secret lithographic establishment or something of the kind.

And then, like a flash, the truth dawned upon me. Forgers! Forgers of bank notes!

Scarcely had I made this startling discovery than the inspector pushed me aside, threw open the door, and dashed into the room with his men at his heels.

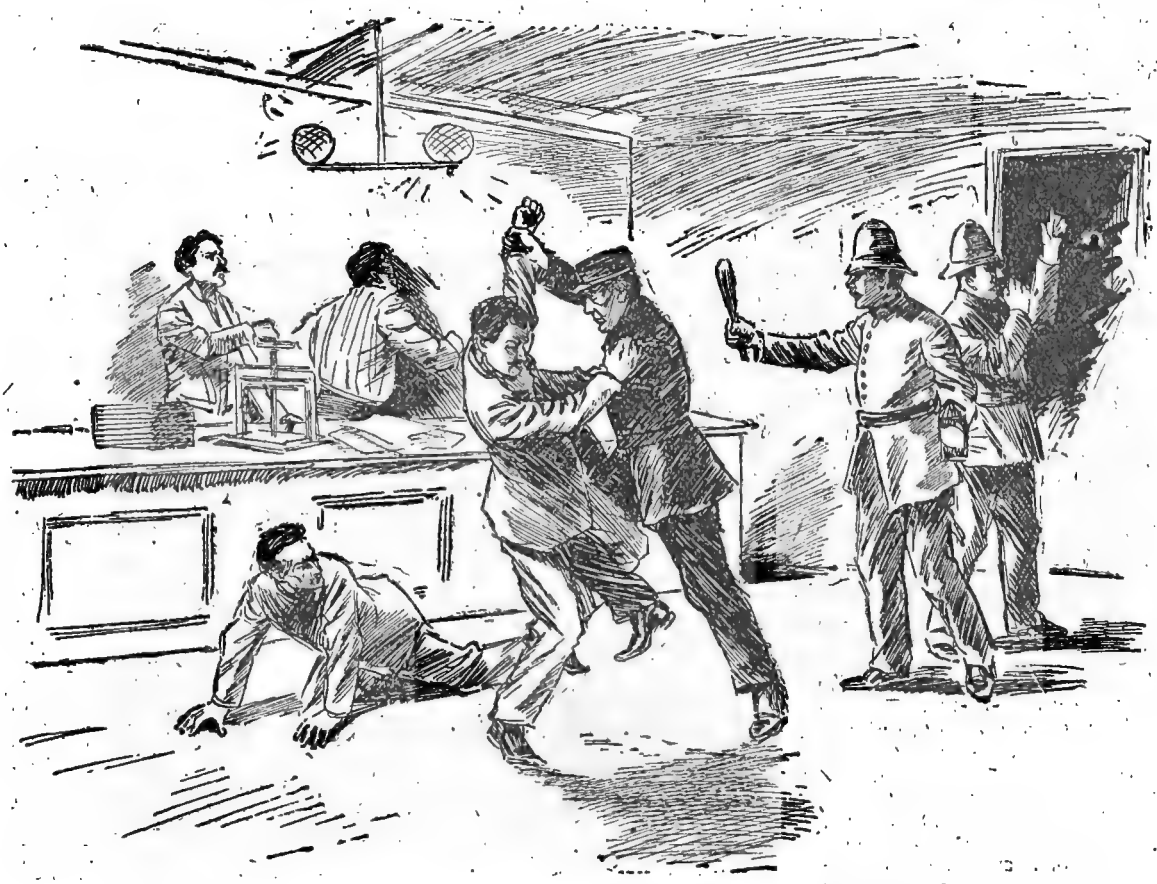
Taken so completely by surprise, the astonished forgers offered a feeble resistance. One or two of them showed fight though, and for the next five minutes or so there was a lively time in that cellar. A tall man, whose appearance differed very materially from the rest, and whom I took for the leader of the gang, had contrived to dart out through a side door, but the police did not take the trouble to follow him, knowing that he would fall into the hands of their comrades outside.

I took no part in the fray, of course, merely standing at the door and looking on. But through it all I was conscious of a most unearthly clamour behind a closed door at the other end of the cellar. And now, when the scuffling was over, the attention of the others was attracted by the extraordinary racket.

"Hi, there! What the dickens is up? Let me out, will you?" bellowed a voice from behind the door.

The inspector looked around the place, took down a key from the wall, and opened the door. Out stepped a very reckless-looking, dissipated character, of the sporting type, blinking his eyes as he came forth into the strong light.

"Who on earth have we got here?" said the inspector, looking at him with the utmost curiosity.



The Inspector threw open the door and dashed into the room with his men at his heels.

Hazel Harlow's stage career will fascinate you.

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"Bill Benton, if you want to know," was the cool reply. "The Johnny who chopped off the fellow's hand."

The inspector glanced across at me, and I was glad to find he had so soon received confirmation of my story.

"That's the reason they clapped me into that confounded hole," Mr. Bill Benton went on, "and would have kept me there, I suppose, until they were ready to clear out. But where's that rascal Seaton?" he added, evidently missing the leader of the gang. "Thunder! You haven't let him slip through your fingers, have you? He's at the head and tail of all this. To think of his having a nest of this kind here, where he hatched these bad eggs," and he pointed to a number of forged notes on the table.

At the inspector's request Benton and I accompanied him to the house, the constables being left in charge of the prisoners. We had some difficulty in gaining admittance; but when we got in at last, and proceeded to make a search, we found the injured man lying in one of the rooms upstairs. He was a slight, good-looking young fellow, almost effeminate in appearance. I noticed that his remaining hand was as slender and delicately-shaped as a woman's. He was, in fact, a skilled engraver, a regular artist in that respect, and the most useful man in the whole gang.

When we went downstairs again Benton told us his story, and I also learned some interesting facts from the inspector. From the two combined I gathered that the ringleader of the band, Hartley Seaton—who, by the way, was the individual who had routed out Travers on that stormy night—was a man of good birth, but one who had gone utterly so the bad. He had got into touch with this gang in London.

Some months ago they disappeared from their old haunts, and were lost to sight for the time being, though it was known that they were still conducting operations in some part of this country.

It appears that Seaton, who knew Norfolk well, had rented this house from the owner, and established himself there with the whole gang. One or two of them passed as his guests, the rest as his servants.

Having fixed upon the cellars in the old ruin as the best place for their work, it became necessary to scare away any chance intruder, for there were a number of people about, labourers and others, who might wander in there at any time.

They accomplished this by a simple trick—and a pot of red paint.

Seaton sent one of the gardeners in there at nightfall, and the fellow was almost frightened to death by the appearance of a hand dripping with blood, which protruded from the wall right before his eyes. That was quite enough. The place got the reputation of being haunted, and not a soul would venture into the ruins even in broad daylight.

All went well until the worthy Bill Benton appeared upon the scene.

He happened to be in the neighbourhood for a day or two, dropped across Seaton by accident—he had met him frequently in sporting circles in London—and coolly invited himself to the house. Seaton could not very well refuse for fear of exciting suspicion.

In the course of the evening some reference was made to the ruins; and the host, wishing to keep this troublesome guest from prying about there, related the incident of the bloody hand.

Benton said nothing at the time, though he immediately suspected some trickery. Later in the evening, while Seaton's back was turned, he armed himself with a cutlass which he found in the hall, procured a lantern, and slipped out to explore the ruins.

He prowled about the rooms on the ground floor, and then made his way down to the cellars. As he was moving along the passage below, the bloody hand appeared out of the wall straight before him.

On the spur of the moment he made a desperate slash at it with his cutlass, and severed it from the wrist.

The appalling yell which rang out on the other side of the wall so startled him that he remained standing there in a sort of bewildered stupor.

He was soon surrounded by the forgers, who dragged him away and confined him in the cellar from which we had just released him.

Meanwhile the police had been put on the track of the gang by a former associate of theirs. They planned this raid, at which, by the merest chance, I happened to be present.

The curious part of it was, though the place was surrounded by police at the time, Seaton contrived to make good his escape. It was generally supposed that there was another secret passage leading to the cellars, besides the one by which we had effected an entrance which was known only to himself.

He had probably reserved it for his own special use in such an eventuality as this, and had made tracks the moment he saw the game was up.

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 22nd. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. C. R. Fletcher, 53 Hagley Road, Birmingham, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

IT is probably the number of tars on board which makes a vessel pitch.

CUSTOMER (entering poultry shop): "I should like to see a nice, fat goose." Small Boy: "Yes, sir, father will be down presently."

WINKS: "Folks say you always leave immediately after the sermon, so as to escape the contribution box." Jinks (hotly): "It's a base slander! The only reason I start so early is simply to get first pick of the umbrellas."

"WHERE is Tommy?" asked Mrs. Brown, uneasily, one night last winter. "Well," answered her husband, as he proceeded to fill his pipe, "I won't say for certain. If the ice is as strong as he thinks it is, he's gone skatin', an' if it ain't, he's gone for a swim!"

FIRST BURGLAR (bursting into bedroom): "Where do you keep your money? Come now, tell us, or I'll put a bullet through your head." Smith: "Oh—er—it's in the pocket of my wife's—er—dress." Second Burglar: "Come on, Bill, we ain't no explorin' expedition, I tell you."

TIMID LADY (about to buy a ticket for America) "And is the boat that sails on Saturday perfectly safe?" Agent (gravely): "Madam, I can assure you that in all the time this ship has been in service, and that is now a number of years, not once has she gone to the bottom." Timid Lady (reassured): "Oh, then it must be all right."

THE other day a Gordon Highlander invited his wife to visit him at the barracks in Scotland. She did so, taking with her their six-year-old girl. When they arrived, as it happened, the husband was engaged on sentry duty, and so they could not approach him. The child eyed her daddy with a rather sorrowful expression as he passed up and down the square, shouldering his rifle and wearing a kilt. "Mamma," she said in a voice that betrayed a trace of childish covetousness, "if daddy finds the man what stole 'ees trousers, will he gimme dat lickle frock?"

IN one of the schools in the East-end where children of all nationalities sit beside each other on the forms, three small boys—one of Irish, another of German, and another of Jewish parentage—all passing as "first-class" in their exams., received from their parents each a silver spoon with a superscription thereon. The day after receiving them they came together and began boasting of their gifts. "On my spoon it says 'A good boy,'" said the little Irish fellow, proudly. "Ya, and on my spoon it says 'A nice boy,'" chirped in the young German. But the youthful Israelite looked contemptuous. "Ach," he said, "on my spoon it says 'Hotel Cecil.'"

ADVICE to any dramatic author who has written a lengthy piece: "Cut and run."

THE man who made "a clean sweep" had a lot of washing to do.

HE (impatiently): "You bet if I were a woman I'd make up my mind pretty quick." She: "Then you wouldn't be a woman."

DOCTOR (to Irish patient): "Do you sleep with your mouth open?" Irish Patient: "Sure, Oi don't know, doctor. Oi've never seen myself whin Oi've been aslape, but Oi'll have a look to-night!"

"WHY will you persist in drinking tea and coffee?" asked the doctor. "A milk diet is the healthiest; it contains all the elements of the human blood." "Very true," replied Fogg, swallowing a third cup of tea, "but then, you know, I'm not bloodthirsty."

WAGGS: "I see there is a good deal of talk about London having a horseless fire-engine. But that is nothing; horseless fire-engines were in common use a hundred years ago." Jaggs: "You are mistaken." Waggs: "No, I am not; they were hauled by the firemen."

MRS. TROPFORD is not as young as she was, but is fairly well preserved, and keeps her age a secret. The other day she was showing a lady friend an old photograph. "Yes," she remarked, "that is a portrait of me when I was five years old." Whereupon Tropford interjected, "Now, my dear, you see I was right after all when I maintained that photography was invented not less than fifty years ago."

MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE (widow): "Well, Johnson, of course, I'm very sorry to lose you. At the same time I must congratulate you on your good fortune in having this money left you." (Pleasantly) "I suppose you'll be looking out for a wife now." Johnson: "Well, mum, beggin' your pardon, and I'm sure I feel greatly honoured at what you propose, but—er—I'm engaged to a young woman already."

THE City Council of Auckland placed a price on the head of every rat in the city, and a grocer's boy became a perfect Nimrod and slew about thirty. At the risk of contracting the plague, he carted his dead along, obtained his scalp-money, and came back jubilant to his master, and told him how much he had made. The master cast upon him an eye of Aberdeen grey, and then remarked quietly: "Weel, weel, ye'll just pay the money to oor cashier, for ye ken the rats is mine, not yours!"

*A ROUGH racecourse tout was hauled before a magistrate charged with assaulting his wife and the police-constable who apprehended him. Asked by his worship what he had to say for himself, he replied: "Well, yer see, it was this way. I comes 'ome, and my missus she jaws me for being boozed, so I gives her one for herself. D'ye brown?" Magistrate: "I scarcely understand what is meant by 'brown.'" The Clerk: "It means 'Do you understand?'" Magistrate: "Oh, yes, I brown. Go on." Defendant: "Then this 'ere copper comes along and begins interferin' wi' us; so I gives 'im a prop for hisself. Do you tumble?" Magistrate: "Do I what?" The Clerk: "Another eccentric word for 'understand,' sir." Magistrate: "Oh, yes, my friend; I tumble. Now, for the assault upon your wife you will go to hard labour for six months. Do you brown? And for interfering with and assaulting the police you will go to gaol for another six months. Do you tumble?"

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THE DEAF AT THE TIME OF MOSES.

It is a confirmed fact that fourteen centuries before the beginning of the Christian Era, probably at the time Moses was guiding the exodus of his people towards the Promised Land, learned men were already intent on discovering a remedy for deafness. In the course of translating an ancient Egyptian Papyrus, the origin of which appears to date back to the reign of Rameses II., and which is preserved in the Berlin Museum, there were found two prescriptions for ear complaints, which were then classified under two headings: Heaviness of hearing (deafness) and leprosy of the ears (suppuration).

After these primitive exertions of the contemporaries of the Great Jewish Legislator, more than thirty centuries were to elapse before any important progress was made in the study of aural diseases, and it is scarcely twelve years ago that the remedial treatment for these diseases was discovered by a French doctor, named Drouet.

After a series of unsuccessful experiments, based on the same lines as those of his colleagues, who insisted on treating affections of the ear internally, or through the Eustachian Tubes and the Auditory Canal, Drouet one day reflected that since the diseased conditions of the auditory membranes proceeded from the same causes as those of all other organs, they ought consequently to yield to the same therapeutic remedies. So it was that he conceived his external treatment, based upon the absorptive properties of the skin, which, as is known, are utilised whenever it is impossible to act upon any part of the body by natural means of egress.

The Drouet system consists of a regular application of plasters, which exercise conjointly a revulsive and soothing action. Cut in the form of a crescent they fit exactly behind the ear, upon the Mastoid Process, and while their active properties penetrate the tissues, the healing effects begin to show; the unhealthy secretions and the suppuration diminish, the buzzing noises grow weaker, while the deafness decreases. Gradually the ear recovers its normal condition; all the symptoms have disappeared, and the deaf man now hears.

It is right to add that simultaneously with these applications, which are used during the night, an adjuvant medication is usually prescribed to assist the external treatment. In this manner rapid cures are effected. For readers who are interested in this subject let us quote a few extracts from letters which are received daily from patients by the Drouet Institute.

Mr. Edward P., a gardener, twenty-six years old, of Penrith, had suffered with deafness and a discharge from the ears since childhood. "I remember," says Mr. E. P., "having a very bad attack about ten years ago, with both ears. From that time they have grown worse. The doctor says the drums are perforated."

At the time of submitting his case to the Institute, the discharge was still running, and gave out an offensive smell. Deafness was very great. The only treatment that had been tried was syringing of the ears to keep them clean as far as possible. The following letters, written by Mr. E. P. whilst under the Drouet treatment, will show the successive phases of his cure:

May 10th, 1901.

I now write you, as requested, a report with regard to the treatment. I am glad and thankful I am on the way, I hope to a complete cure. I have got perfect relief with the right ear, and can hear with it as well as anyone, the left ear is also improving very rapidly. I can hear splendidly after only one week's treatment. I am also improving in other ways, the nervous and giddy, or unsteady, feeling has left me, so that I cannot complain in any way on any point, as I feel like a new creature altogether. I will write you later.

(Signed) E. P.

Penrith, May 22nd, 1901.

I now write to inform you that after only a fortnight of your valuable treatment, I have now gained a complete and genuine cure. My friends are quite surprised at such a great change in so short a time. Thanks to Providence that I was led to consult you. I shall recommend you to everyone whom I may meet with similarly afflicted. My left ear is now perfectly cured, along with the right one. I can hear splendidly. I caught cold a few days ago, but it did not have the least effect upon my ears as formerly.

Hoping you may be as successful in future cases,

I remain, &c. (Signed) E. P.

Note.—The Drouet Institute have been authorised to give the full name and address privately to any applicant.

While ear diseases are so successfully dealt with at the Drouet Institute, affections of the nose and throat, which are closely connected with the former, are also the subject of special treatment. Here is a case in point:

Miss V. A., of Hove, as the consequence of an ordinary cold in the head, became affected, eighteen months ago, with throat disease. There was constant inclination to clear the throat, the tonsils swell sometimes, and when swallowing there seemed to be a lump in the throat; the voice lost its tone and grew weak, and at times the deafness was very great.

Twice Miss V. A. was treated for "Throat deafness and Catarrh," by means of inhalations and the use of tonics; but, deriving no lasting benefit, this young lady applied to the Drouet Institute for advice. Following the Institute's prescriptions, she soon found great relief, and ultimately a complete cure was obtained, as may be seen from the following letter:

Hove, May 21st. 1901.

I have much pleasure in informing you that your treatment has been quite successful. I have discontinued the medicines for nearly a fortnight (during which I have used my voice a great deal), without any sign of the throat trouble reappearing. So think I may safely say the cure is complete. With thanks, etc.,

(Signed) V. A.

The original letter, with all the others of which extracts have been given above, may be seen in the Autograph Room of the Drouet Institute, where hundreds of letters emanating from grateful patients are kept. The Autograph Room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. to six p.m.

Let us state again, that a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf" will be forwarded gratis to any applicant. All persons affected with a disease of the Ear, Nose, or Throat should read it, and also ask for the Report Form, which will allow them to submit their case to the Drouet Institute. This form is sent free of charge, and the advice given is always gratuitous. For all additional information write to the Secretary of the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.

Personal consultations are held daily, except Sundays, from two to four p.m. In this case a fee is charged for examination. Special consultations may also be had at any time by making an appointment with the consulting physician.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Another treat coming! I am pleased to be able to announce that I have secured the absolutely exclusive right to publish a new series of long complete stories, entitled:

"The Adventures of an Actress."

The stories are written by that well-known author, Mr. Donovan Mart, and deal with the career of Hazel Harlow, a young and beautiful actress. In these stories will be vividly told how Hazel Harlow, daughter of a country farmer, came to London; how she joined a touring theatrical company and moved about from town to town; and how she met with countless temptations and trials, and emerged spotless through them all. They will reveal little known sides of stage life; will shed a lurid light upon its dark corners; will tell of its infinite difficulties to a pure and innocent girl, of its petty jealousies and its violent hates; and, in short, will lay bare the naked truth regarding the stage and its votaries in a way never before attempted. The series will begin in the August Bank Holiday number.

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I would suggest, in view of the large demand which is sure to exist, that you fill in the form below and hand it to your newsagent.

Please reserve for me a copy of *Short Stories* dated August 10th.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Apropos of a subject I referred to last week, the following is interesting:

Some time ago a notice appeared in the Chicago newspapers which dazed some people and shocked others. It was printed in heavy block type, and was as follows:

"DEAD!

"The Following Cablegram Explains Itself. Read It.

"Nice, March 21.—M. ——, Chicago; I have the misfortune to announce to you that Mr. Blank, after much suffering, died to-day at 2 p.m. Mrs. Blank.

"In consequence of the sad news of the death abroad of a member of our firm, our store will remain closed to-day, Friday, March 22. Not only a dissolution sale, but the immense stock will be sold at your own price to settle the estate. We must expedite matters.

"Three hundred thousand dollars' worth of ready-made clothing at 27½ cents on the dollar of the original wholesale price. Here is your chance! Avail yourself of it! Our unfortunate necessity is your opportunity, etc., etc."

Though people thought the taste of the surviving partners was execrable, the sale was a success. Then it came out that there was no such person as Mr. Blank, and that no member of the firm had died. The whole thing was an advertisement.

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"Investigator."—"You are a daisy" is used by Dickens in "David Copperfield" in the sense of calling a person a daisy in the way to express admiration and at the same time to laugh at one's credulity. Steerforth says to young Copperfield: "David, my daisy, you are so innocent of the world. Let me call you my daisy, as it is so refreshing to find one in these corrupt days so innocent and unsophisticated. My dear Copperfield, the daisies of the field are not fresher than you."

"Dun" is a word, the meaning of which is known to everyone who understands the English language. About the beginning of the century a constable named John Dun became celebrated as a first-class collector of bad accounts. When others would fail to collect a bad debt, Dun would be sure to get it out of the debtor. It soon passed into a current phrase that when a person owed money, and did not pay when asked, he would have to be "dunned." Hence it soon became common in such cases to say: "You will have to dun So-and-So if you wish to collect your money."

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Here is a little history help that should be cut out by young people and pasted on the fly-leaf of their English history. By referring to it as they study they will soon learn it, and carry it always:

First William the Norman, then William his son,
Henry, Stephen, and Henry, then Richard and John;
After Henry the Third, Edwards one, two and three,
After Richard the Second, three Henrys we see.
Fourth Edward precedes the Third Richard, then press
Two Henrys, Sixth Edward, Queen Mary, Queen Bess,
Next Jamie from Scotland, and Charles must be reckoned,
By Cromwell succeeded, and then Charles the Second.
After him we had James, who relinquished the throne
To William and Mary, then William alone.
Till Anne, the four Georges, Fourth William all passed—
Victoria then reigned, Seventh Edward is last.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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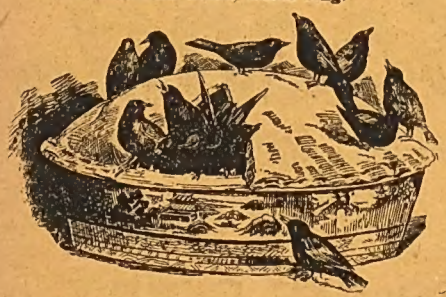

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